

KARNATAKA TRANSITION

Siddaramaiah bows out of poll politics

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Nilekani to lead task force on exams: Modi

Will recommend steps to secure exam system; former ISRO Chairman is among the members

Pralhad Joshi takes charge as Education Minister, chairs meeting to review the Ministry’s initiatives

This is only an attempt to fix the Pradhan Mantri’s compromised image, says Cong’s Jairam Ramesh

Nistula Hebbar
Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced the constitution of a high-powered task force, to be headed by former UIDAI Chairman Nandan Nilekani, to recommend steps to make the country’s examination system leak-proof and technology-driven.

The announcement came a day after former Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned following widespread protests over the NEET paper leak and subsequent re-examination.

Meanwhile, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi on Sunday officially took charge of the Ministry of Education at Kartavya Bhavan.

Mr. Joshi, who also holds the portfolios of Consumer Affairs, Food and

Public Distribution, and New and Renewable Energy, chaired a meeting of the Ministry to review the implementation of various schemes and other initiatives.

“We should ensure that our exam system can be trusted, and is transparent, and tech-driven. Under the leadership of renowned technology expert Nandan Nilekani, a high-powered task force will be formed, which will focus on exam reforms,” the Prime Minister said in a video posted on Instagram.

‘Compromised image’

“The Centre is taking multiple steps to ensure that those who have played with the future of students are punished. We have already announced the formation of fast-track courts. We are bringing a stringent law in Parliament on Monday,” he said.

Responding to the an-

We should ensure that our exam system can be trusted and is transparent and tech-driven... the Centre is taking multiple steps to ensure that those who have played with the future of students are punished

NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister

Nandan Nilekani has worked with Union govt. in the past to set up the Aadhaar ecosystem and UPI

nouncement, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said the Centre was yet to implement the K. Radhakrishnan Committee’s 101 recommendations after the 2024 examination leaks.

“This is ultimately only

a high-powered attempt to fix the Pradhan Mantri’s irretrievably compromised image,” he said on X.

The multidisciplinary panel of domain experts will help revamp the National Testing Agency’s examination system, especially from a technology perspective, sources said, adding the committee under Mr. Nilekani will consist of former ISRO Chairman S. Somanath; former IB Director Tapan Deka; IIT-Madras Director V. Kamakoti; former Education

Rahul questions Shah over ‘barbaric assault’ in Delhi

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Seeking accountability for the “barbaric assault” on students during the march in Delhi on July 20, Rahul

Gandhi has asked the Home Minister whether he had authorised the use of “lethal force”.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 5

Secretary Anita Karwal, and logistics expert Amrit Lal Meena.

Mr. Nilekani has worked with the Union Government in the past to set up the Aadhaar ecosystem and Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

Joshi takes charge

He is also the chairperson of the governing body of the economic policy research think tank the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and a co-founder

of Infosys.

After assuming charge of the Education Ministry, Mr. Joshi told media persons, “The Prime Minister has entrusted me with this responsibility with full confidence. I was in Karnataka yesterday. I reached here last night and came this morning to take charge. I have assumed charge.”

“I am reviewing all the details here and the decisions that need to be taken. I have been gathering information and trying to un-

derstand the functioning of the Ministry. We had continuous meetings today. This is a new subject for me. I have taken charge today and held detailed discussions with the senior officers. It is a very big Department, so I will speak to you in detail after I have understood it completely,” Mr. Joshi stated.

Union Minister of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary attended the meeting. Officials said Mr. Joshi reviewed key schemes, including Samagra Shiksha, PM-SHRI Schools and PM POSHAN, and discussed school infrastructure.

Higher Education Department secretary, School Education and Literacy Department secretary and other senior officials of the Ministry were present at the meeting.

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INSIDE



Israeli settlers set two mosques on fire in West Bank

NABLUS

Israeli settlers attacked Palestinian villages in the occupied West Bank early on Sunday, setting fire to two mosques and scrawling graffiti on buildings, Palestinian officials said. » PAGE 14

India scaling new heights in defence production: PM

NEW DELHI

India is scaling new heights in defence production, exports, and political cooperation with friendly nations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday in *Mann Ki Baat*, his monthly radio address. » PAGE 6

Tehran says it is halting ‘retaliatory strikes’ on U.S.

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Extending the weekend lull in fighting in West Asia, with the United States having halted operations after 13 days of strikes, Iran announced on Sunday that it too was halting its operations.

Iran’s Army spokesperson Mohammad Akraminia was reported as saying: “Since our strategy has essentially been retaliatory, we have also halted our retaliatory operations.”

On Sunday, Iran’s Tasnim news agency claimed that a tanker exploded after it hit a mine while transiting the Strait of Hormuz through a route Tehran had not approved. The news agency had made a similar claim about another tanker on July 23, adding that two other tankers had refrained from crossing the Strait after that incident.

While bodies that assess maritime threats, such as the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, did not confirm these explosions, they have nevertheless warned of heightened risks from mines in the Strait.

Iran said on Sunday that it had made progress in talks with neighbouring Oman, which holds the opposite coast of the Strait, on “common principles and operational mechanisms” for ships in the Strait. While the two nations had come up with a proposal in June to jointly administer the Strait and monetise it, the U.S. had refused to accept any Iranian control.

TALKS IN OMAN
» PAGE 14

Mirabai makes it a golden day for India; Rishikanta clinches a silver

K. Keerthivasan
GLASGOW

Weightlifting has always been one of the disciplines that has contributed significantly to India’s tally at the Commonwealth Games. The fact that the country has won as many as 33 medals in the last three editions underlines the vital role of the weightlifters.

On Sunday, the opening day of the weightlifting competition here, Indians once again made their presence felt by winning two medals – a gold and silver.

Hours after Rishikanta Singh Chanambam finished second in the men’s 60kg category, Mirabai Chanu produced a golden moment in the women’s 48kg class. For the latter, it was her third successive Commonwealth Games yellow metal after Gold Coast (2018) and Birmingham (2022).

New record

Surprisingly, the 31-year-old Mirabai had a shaky start to her snatch sequence, missing the opening attempt at 82kg. She, however, remained unflustered and returned to successfully lift the weight.

The lifter from Manipur went on to clear 85kg on her third visit, establishing a new Commonwealth Games record much to the delight of the Indian fans at the venue.

After failing to clear 105kg in her first clean and jerk attempt, Mirabai managed to overcome the challenge in her se-



Manipuris’ day out: It was triple delight for Mirabai while Rishikanta (below) became the first male lifter from the State to win a medal in the Commonwealth Games. PTI



cond try and finished with a total of 190kg, both new Games marks.

Ruth Asuquo Nyong of Nigeria won silver with a total lift of 168kg while Irene Jane Henry of Malaysia clinched bronze with 167kg.

Earlier, Rishikanta won India’s second medal at the Games with his silver.

The 28-year-old began the snatch series with 116kg, increased it to 119kg and even-

tually produced a 121kg lift.

In clean and jerk, the Manipur lifter passed the 143kg test but failed in his next two attempts at 148kg and 151kg. Rishikanta finished with a combined lift of 264kg.

Malaysia’s Mohamad Aniq Kasdan won the gold with a total lift of 273kg, setting a Games record.

The Malaysian lifter also registered a new Games high in clean and jerk with 152kg.

Kenya’s Joshua Amunga Mobye was the other podium finisher, thanks to his overall effort of 264kg (snatch: 121kg; clean and jerk: 143kg).

MORE REPORTS ON
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Govt. warns seafarers about jobs in ‘volatile’ Black Sea

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The External Affairs Ministry on Sunday issued an advisory urging Indian seafarers to “carefully assess security risks” before accepting jobs on commercial ships that operate “in and around the Black Sea and adjoining maritime areas”, citing increasing drone and missile attacks on ships in the region that remains highly volatile due to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Earlier, the Indian Embassy in Ukraine said that it was “closely monitoring” the situation after a projectile hit the *MV AGN Ragnar* in Ukraine’s Black Sea port of Odesa on Saturday. The ship employed four Indian seafarers, of whom two have been found to be safe while information about the other two is still awaited. There has been an increase in the number of such incidents since April, resulting in the deaths of five Indian seafarers, the Ministry said.

“Indian nationals intending to undertake employment on commercial vessels operating in or transiting the conflict-affected region are advised to carefully assess the prevailing security risks before accepting such assignments,” the Ministry said in its advisory, noting the security situation in the region and around the Black Sea and adjoining maritime areas.

“Commercial vessels operating in or transiting these waters are facing significant security risks, including missile and drone attacks,” it said.

The Ministry urged Indians to follow a set of precautions, such as obtaining



The Ministry of External Affairs has cited increasing attacks on ships in the region. FILE PHOTO/REUTERS

“comprehensive information from employers/recruitment agencies and ship operators regarding the vessel’s intended route, ports of call, security arrangements, and emergency response procedures”.

The “terms of employment” should “comply with applicable maritime standards and provide adequate provisions for medical care, evacuation, repatriation, and compensation in the event of an emergency,” it said.

Indian seafarers were urged to follow all the advisories issued by the Directorate General of Maritime Administration, including one issued on July 23.

Rescue ops under way

The latest advisory came a day after the *MV AGN Ragnar* was struck at the port of Odesa. “Four Indian nationals were on board the vessel. As per the latest information, two have been confirmed safe, and information is awaited regarding the other two nationals. Search and rescue operations are under way. The Embassy is in constant touch with the concerned authorities,” the Indian Embassy in Kyiv said, without specifying who had fired the projectile.

Earlier on July 19, the *MV Golden Leo*, a Guinea

Bissau-flagged ship was also hit by projectiles that led to the deaths of ten seafarers, of whom four were Indian citizens. This incident had prompted the MEA to summon the chargé d’affaires of the Russian Embassy in India.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on the sidelines of the East Asia summit in Manila on July 22, where he expressed “strong concern regarding the safety of Indian seafarers in the region”.

Subsequently, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that Russia was in touch with India over the matter. However, he said, “Our armed forces are striking and will continue to strike those vessels that are involved in transporting ammunition, weapons and so on, for the purposes of the Kiev regime.”

Responding to this, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, “As per the information that was made available to us by the Directorate General of Maritime Administration, *Golden Leo*, was Guinea-Bissau-flagged on which we lost four of our nationals... We reiterate that commercial shipping and seafarers should not be attacked under any circumstances.”

INBRIEF



Take note of ‘irregularities’ in JPSC exam, Champai urges HC

BJP leader Champai Soren on Sunday urged the High Court to take suo motu cognisance of alleged irregularities in the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission examinations and order a CBI probe into all recruitment processes conducted by the two panels over the last few years. The former Chief Minister, in a social media post, said those “toying with the future of the youth” should not receive government protection but instead harsh punishment. He expressed doubts over the impartiality of the investigation by the State CID. PTI

Dipke sparked revolution, must get security, says Sena Minister

Maharashtra Minister and Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Shirsat on Sunday expressed pride that Abhijeet Dipke, founder of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) and resident of his Aurangabad West Assembly constituency, had sparked a revolution and deserved security. Mr. Shirsat was speaking to reporters after visiting Mr. Dipke’s family in the Waluj MIDC area of Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar. Mr. Shirsat said Mr. Dipke, who is yet to return home despite the CJP calling off its protest, must be given security. “His parents were worried because every parent wants their kids to remain safe,” he said. PTI

Palaniswami, ex-AIADMK MLAs to appear before Speaker on July 30

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker J.C.D. Prabhakar has asked AIADMK general secretary and party floor leader Edappadi K. Palaniswami and four former party MLAs, who are facing disqualification proceedings under the provisions of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, to appear before him on July 30.

In a letter sent from the Assembly Secretariat to Mr. Palaniswami, Assembly Secretary R. Santhi said the Speaker had called four

former AIADMK MLAs – Maragatham Kumaravel (Maduranthagam), P. Sathiyabama (Dharapuram), S. Jeyakumar (Perundurai), and Esaaki Subaya (Ambasamudram) – to appear before him individually between 11 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. on July 30, allotting each of them 30 minutes. The Speaker also asked Mr. Palaniswami to appear before him during the same time.

Disqualification plea This was pursuant to a disqualification petition submitted by Mr. Palaniswami on May 13, after 25 rebel

Not a single paper leak case under AAP govt. in Punjab, says CM amid Oppn. attack

Cong. seeks State Education Minister’s ouster over ‘repeated paper leaks’; in Phagwara, Haryana CM calls out ‘serious lapses’, ‘repeated leaks’; youth protesting for jobs clash with police in Sangrur

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH/SANGRUR

Ending off criticism by the Congress, Shiromani Akali Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party over “paper leaks” in poll-bound Punjab, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday said, “We have been in power for the past four and a half years. Not a single paper leak has happened in Punjab.”

Addressing an event in Zirakpur to honour 882 government school students who cleared the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) re-exam recently, Mr. Mann said only one case of cheating had come to light during his tenure and that the police had dismantled a “highly sophisticated, inter-State cheating racket” operating during the recently held Pharmacy Officer exam.

Hitting out at the Mann government, State Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja Warring said,



CM Bhagwant Mann, AAP’s Manish Sisodia at an event to felicitate govt. school students who cleared NEET, in Mohali on Sunday. ANI

“While Dharmendra Pradhan has been forced to resign as the Union Education Minister, Punjab Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains is still in office. He must also go for repeated paper leaks in Punjab.”

Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini also hit out at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, accusing it of “betraying” the youth by failing to ensure transparency in recruitment exams. Referring to the recent Excise Inspector

recruitment examination, the senior BJP leader, who was addressing a function in Phagwara, alleged that the results reflected “serious irregularities”, with selected candidates carrying names such as “SBI”, “GIPS” and “Photo”.

He also criticised the Punjab government over the “leak” of the recent Pharmacy Officer paper. The Haryana CM alleged that “repeated incidents of paper leaks amount to a betrayal of talented and

hardworking youth” aspiring for government jobs.

March to CM’s house Meanwhile, clashes were reported in Sangrur on Sunday between youth protesting under the banner of ‘Berozgar Sanyukt Morcha’, who were trying to march to the CM’s residence, and police personnel. The protesters, who have been staging a sit-in outside the Deputy Commissioner’s office, began their march with banners demanding government jobs and the fulfilment of their pending demands.

The police placed barricades on the route leading to the CM’s house. A scuffle broke out when the youth tried to move past the barricades. Some protesters sustained minor injuries while a few participants, including women, reportedly fainted at the protest site. Leaders of the outfit said they will continue the stir until the government accepts their demands.

U.P. CM takes on SP in Etawah, Mainpuri; reaches out to youth

Press Trust of India
ETAWAH/MAINPURI/AGRA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took on the Samajwadi Party (SP) in its strongholds of Etawah and Mainpuri on Sunday, where he addressed the youth and inaugurated development projects worth over ₹1,200 crore.

At a function in Etawah, the home district of the late SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, the CM held the previous SP government responsible for tarnishing the district’s image through nepotism and poor governance. “The youth of Etawah no longer face an identity crisis. Wherever they go, they receive the same respect as people from any other district,” Mr. Adityanath said after inaugurating and laying the foundation stones for 128 development projects worth around ₹604 crore for Etawah, Jaswantnagar, and Bharthana Assembly seats. He also distributed certificates to beneficiaries of various government schemes.

In Mainpuri, represented in the Lok Sabha by SP chief Akhilesh Yadav’s wife Dimple Yadav, Mr. Aditya-



U.P. CM Yogi Adityanath in Mainpuri on Sunday. ANI

nath said, “There was a time when people used to get frightened by the name of Mainpuri. Today, if a youth, a farmer or a trader from Mainpuri introduces himself anywhere in the country, people are eager to show him respect.”

He also laid foundation stones for 111 development projects worth about ₹682 crore for Mainpuri and Karhal Assembly seats.

‘Fight misinformation’

At a separate event in Agra, the CM urged teachers and educational institutions to play a “proactive role in combating misinformation” and guide students towards credible sources, warning that social media is being used to spread “hatred” in society. U.P. is set to go to polls next year.

Not shifting to national politics, says Fadnavis

Press Trust of India
NAGPUR

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday dismissed speculation about him shifting to national politics.

According to sources, Mr. Fadnavis made a quick trip to the national capital on Saturday and later returned to Nagpur amid speculation about his possible shift to national politics against the backdrop of Dharmendra Pradhan’s resignation as the Union Education Minister.

Asked by reporters in

Nagpur about his visit to Delhi, the Chief Minister said, “Today, I am in Nagpur and will be going to Mumbai in the evening. I am in Mumbai and Maharashtra only.”

Meanwhile, Deputy CM Eknath Shinde on Sunday claimed that people have defeated the Opposition’s alleged attempt to use students’ protests to create unrest in the country. “The Opposition tried to exploit the emotions of students for political gain, but the [Narendra] Modi government delivered justice through action,” he said.

Bengal CM meets kin of victims of Sundarbans trawler capsize

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari on Sunday met the families of the victims of the Sundarbans trawler capsize earlier this month and announced several steps for better disaster management preparedness in coastal areas.

At least 11 fishermen died while four went missing after a trawler from Purba Medinipur capsized on July 8. The vessel lost communication soon after setting off and remained missing till it was traced by



Suwendu Adhikari

the Coast Guard on July 14 at Bangher Chawk Island in the Sundarbans.

Soon after the incident, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced ex gratia of ₹2 lakh each for the kin of the victims. On July 22, Mr. Adhikari also an-

nounced ex gratia of ₹5 lakh each and a civic volunteer job for one eligible member from each of the families of the victims.

“Many such incidents took place earlier but the then government never cared about them. Our government did. We feel that it is our responsibility,” the CM said on Sunday.

‘Efficient officers’

In view of the “poor status” of the coastal police stations, Mr. Adhikari declared that efficient officers will be appointed in those stations immediately.

SPOTLIGHT

Rahul Karmakar

Almost six decades ago, the Brahmaputra devoured Pashan Ali’s house at Charai Khasara village in south-western Assam’s Goalpara district. Now, a legal hurdle in the land through which the river flows is threatening to erode his grandson Aminul Hoque’s Indian citizenship.

On February 28, 2019, Aminul’s world came crashing down when the Foreigners’ Tribunal (FT) No. 4 in Guwahati adjudged him a non-citizen. The 38-year-old had been staying in a rented house at Borbori, a rural area on the outskirts of Guwahati, working as a daily-wage labourer when the police came knocking in 2016. Later, he told the court that the investigating officer referred his case to the FT the following year “without fair or proper inquiry”.

Created under the Foreigners Act, 1946, the FTs are Assam-specific quasi-judicial bodies set up to address cross-border migration, prevent infiltration, and enforce the provisions of the 1985 Assam Accord, which ended a violent anti-foreigner agitation from 1979-1985.

One of the key provisions is to detect and detain suspected illegal immigrants who entered the State after March 24, 1971,

and deport them. Such people, detected by personnel of the Assam police’s Border wing or those marked ‘D’ (doubtful) by the Election Commission are referred to the FTs.

“Aminul was lost after the FT judgement. His family challenged it in Gauhati High Court, but he was shocked that he, the youngest sibling, was the only member of his family to be deemed a foreigner,” Khoiruddin Mollah, a family friend and a trader based in Lakhipur, a block headquarters in Goalpara district, says. He adds that Aminul was scared when, last year, news broke of people possessing valid documents being pushed into Bangladesh.

After the Brahmaputra eroded his land, Pashan Ali moved to Dobakura with his family, in the 1960s. In 1973, he purchased a plot at Ghugudoba, about 4 kilometres away, where his son Mohiruddin and his family shifted. The land, according to the documents submitted, measured 2 bighas, 1 katha, and 5 lessas. In Assam, 20 lessas make a katha, equivalent to 2,880 square feet, and 5 kathas make a bigha.

The Ghugudoba plot is on the northern bank of the Jinjiram, a Meghalaya-origin river almost as “land-hungry” as the Brahmaputra, which it meets after flowing for 120 kilometres. Later, the family moved to Hashdoba, about

Eroding identities of Brahmaputra’s children

Across Assam, decades of govt.-issued records are failing the citizenship test before Foreigners Tribunals and the Gauhati High Court as spelling variations, age mismatches, and shifting residences come under scrutiny



Among the documents Aminul Hoque submitted to the HC against the order declaring him a foreigner was the deed of a land near the Brahmaputra, which eroded his grandfather’s first house. RITU RAJ KONWAR

3 kilometres away from Ghugudoba.

The original land purchase deed was one of 15 documents Aminul submitted to the High Court in his defence. The Bench of Justice Kalyan Rai Surana and Justice Shamima Jahhan did not find the deed and the other documents convincing enough to establish Aminul as an Indian citizen. The other documents included the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC) featuring the names of

Aminul’s father, grandparents, and other family members; a 2017 school certificate from the government-aided Hashdoba Ancholik High School; and certified copies of voters’ lists from 1966 to 2015.

Family on the move

The court also did not take a “serious note of the spelling discrepancies” in names of Aminul’s parents and grandfather in various documents. While his father Mohiruddin Sheikh be-

came Mahruriddin Sheikh, Mohiruddin, and Mohir Uddin; his mother Foziron Nessa featured as Nesa Khatun and Nesaton Bibi; and his grandfather Pashan Ali Sheikh became Pashan Ali, Pasan Ali, and Pashan Sheikh.

The court noted that the FT took into account the 1979 voters’ list, which contained nine names. Two of them – Joshimuddin and Ashiya Khatun – were not proved to be Pashan Sheikh’s family members.

The tribunal also found discrepancies in the ages of some family members: Foziron Nessa was 25 years in the 1979 voters’ list, but 29 in the 1985 list (as Nessa Khatun). Moreover, the name of one of the six siblings of Pashan Ali, whom Aminul named in his oral testimony was missing from the 1989 electoral rolls, while the 1997 voters’ list had three members – his parents and brother Fozir Ali.

Aminul left Guwahati to work elsewhere in the country after the High Court upheld the FT judgement on June 30. His acquaintances have a hunch that he could be either in Arunachal Pradesh or Meghalaya, possibly working in the hazardous coal mines that offer higher wages and a certain degree of anonymity.

Mahmud, Aminul’s lawyer, cited the case of Dhubri district’s Sirajul Hoque, whom the Supreme Court set free in February 2019, two years after two English letters – ‘f’ and ‘m’ – sent him to a detention camp in eastern Assam’s Jorhat. An FT in Dhubri had declared him a foreigner in 2017 because of a mismatch in his grandfather’s name, which read Kematullah in some documents and Kefatullah in some others.

“A large number of documents that the Supreme Court accepts in various cases are surprisingly disbelieved by the High Court

and the FTs for minor discrepancies. In the Sirajul judgement, the apex court observed that minor discrepancies in names and ages, and the shifting of residence do not constitute a major offence,” Mahmud says.

Documents rejected

What Aminul experienced a few weeks ago, Mohela Khatun of Darrang district went through in September 2019 when the 27 documents she submitted failed the citizenship test in the High Court. One of these documents was a certificate issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang on February 15, 2013, certifying her as an elected panchayat member.

The FT-4 in Mangaldoi, the headquarters of Darrang district, rejected almost all the documents, including a copy of the 1951 NRC featuring her “projected” grandparents. They also rejected a school transfer certificate from Japiya Government-aided High School in Bongaigaon district post-marriage to Jaidul Islam of No. 3 Dhoipur village in Darrang district.

The FT-4 said these documents were “liable to be discarded” as they failed to establish her linkage to her father, shown as Abdul Kader of Japiya village and Abdul Kader Mandal of Baraichala village, both in Bongaichara district, in different documents. The FT-4 also rejected the docu-

ments connecting her to Desaruiddin and Asiran Bibi, whom she claimed to be her grandfather and grandmother, declaring her to be a foreigner.

Mohela, now 46, served two years at a detention centre as a declared foreigner. Out on bail, she filed a review petition at the High Court in May 2025, seeking a re-examination of the order upholding the FT-4 verdict. “We exhausted almost all our resources in contesting this case, so much so that we have to think twice about visiting our lawyer in Guwahati (about 60 km south-west of Dhoipur),” her husband, resigned to a long haul, says.

Tough legal fight

Like Mohela’s husband, Rukiya Begum is bracing for a tough legal fight to prove that her husband Mainuddin Ahmed, a Hindi teacher at the government-aided Nanglichar Middle English School near Mangaldoi, is a citizen. Ahmed was sent to the Matia centre on June 29 after the designated FT declared him a foreigner despite the submission of 26 documents, including his appointment letter. “We are challenging the FT verdict in the High Court. Let’s see how far we can go to establish him as an Indian,” his wife says, from their house in Ninjagajan village in Darrang district.

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INBRIEF



TDP's people's outreach to focus on NDA's success

The TDP is set to launch a 45-day door-to-door campaign on Monday on the achievements of the coalition government in the last two years. Addressing party leaders and public representatives on the eve of the campaign through a teleconference on Sunday, TDP national president and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said the two years of governance and crucial issues must be highlighted.

Andhra Pradesh govt. unveils AI platform to forecast floods

The Andhra Pradesh government has launched City Flood Alert, an AI-powered technology platform developed by the Real Time Governance Society (RTGS) with the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) and IIT-Gandhinagar. The platform is designed to predict urban flooding before it occurs, enabling authorities to take preventive measures well in advance. The platform will initially be deployed in Vijayawada.

Vemulawada temple set to receive additional ₹99.4 cr.

The ongoing expansion and development work at the Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy temple in Vemulawada of Rajanna Sircilla district in Telangana is set to receive an additional ₹99.40 crore. According to temple sources, the government had earlier allocated ₹50 crore in the 2023-24 Budget and ₹100 crore in the 2024-25 Budget for the temple development works. The development works, taken up at an estimated cost of ₹150 crore, are progressing.

Siddaramaiah calls time on career in electoral politics

Former Karnataka CM says he will not contest the 2028 Assembly election but will continue to serve people and the party; the year marks 50 years of his political career, Congress leader says

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

Former Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has announced his retirement from electoral politics, while asserting that he will continue to remain active in public life and work for the Congress and the people.

Addressing a gathering during the 86th birth anniversary celebrations of former Speaker, the late ‘K.R. Pet’ Krishna, at K.R. Pet town in Mandya district on Saturday, the veteran Congress leader said he would not contest the 2028 Assembly election.



Turned down: Siddaramaiah declined party's offer of Rajya Sabha seat, saying he is not interested in national politics. ANI

However, would remain active in politics.

The announcement came after supporters urged him to remain in electoral politics for another decade.

He had also declined the

party's reported offer of a Rajya Sabha seat, saying he was not interested in national politics.

‘Polluted politics’ Later, in a Facebook post on Sunday, Mr. Siddara-

maiah said the changing nature of politics had influenced his decision.

“Politics has become polluted. Therefore, I have decided not to contest the 2028 Assembly election. However, I will remain active in politics, stay with the people and continue to support them,” he said.

Recalling his political journey, Mr. Siddaramaiah said he entered public life in 1978 as a member of the Taluk Board and would complete 50 years in politics in 2028.

“I have witnessed victory and defeat, but I have never compromised on my ideology or betrayed my conscience,” he said.

Revanth to speak to Rahul over opening doors of Parliament, Assembly to Gen Z

R. Ravikanth Reddy
HYDERABAD

Proposing a new slogan – “Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan and Jai Yuva” – Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has said that the country should be ready to channel the energies of the Gen Z (demographic group born roughly between 1997 to 2012) and give them more political opportunities.

He will take the first step towards this by proposing to Congress leader Rahul

Gandhi a reduction of the age for entry into the Legislature to 21, Mr. Reddy said in an informal chat with the media here on Sunday.

He said that the issue would be discussed with Mr. Gandhi and AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge during his visit to New Delhi on Monday.

Mr. Gandhi would be requested to discuss this with the INDIA bloc partners and other parties, the Chief Minister said.

The Telangana govern-

ment would pass a resolution in the Assembly in August this year, he said, adding that in Parliament, the Opposition could explore the opportunity to introduce it as a Private Members’ Bill to put pressure on the ruling party.

Mr. Reddy further said that several seniors in his party were in tune with his idea of passing a resolution in the State Assembly in August.

“We will send the resolution to the Centre so that

the proposal could be discussed along with the proposed Delimitation Bill, Women’s Reservation Bill and the enhancement of Lok Sabha seats.”

“If needed, the proposal could also be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for consultations,” he said.

“Mr. Modi can no longer depend on one-way communication like with his ‘Mann ki Baat’ on radio. He also has to listen to the country’s voice.”

Two workers killed in explosion at illegal fireworks unit in T.N.

S. Sundar
SIVAKASI



Rescue services Personnel spraying water at the site of the explosion. G. MOORTHY

Two workers were killed and another suffered 75% burn injuries in an explosion at an illegal fireworks unit functioning out of a shed near Sengamalapatti in Sivakasi on Sunday. A search is under way for two persons, who, according to their relatives, also worked at the unit.

The police identified one of the deceased as R. Ramprakash, 36, of Sengamalapatti. The other victim is yet to be identified. The injured person was identified as R. Ramachandran, 38, Ramprakash's elder brother. He has been admitted to the Virudhunagar Government Medical College hospital and is in a critical condition. Tamil Nadu Fire and Rescue Services personnel from Sivakasi, led by Station Officer T. Seenivasan, rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control after a lengthy operation.

A van that was parked near the shed was gutted, while a two-wheeler was partially burnt in the blaze.

White fumes could be seen several kilometres from the shed after a loud blast was heard around 8.30 a.m. Parts of the van were found some 20 metres from the site of the explosion. The window panes of two houses in the vicinity of the shed were shattered during the explosion.

Neighbours claimed that they had been unaware that an illegal fireworks manufacturing unit

was operating in the area. “We have seen those in the shed running a nursery and also water being fetched by vans from a nearby irrigation well. We never suspected that they had been making firecrackers illegally,” said Muthulakshmi, a 51-year-old resident of the locality.

Virudhunagar MLA P. Selvam rushed to the spot and oversaw and rescue operations. He said the Sivakasi East police had uncovered 10 similar illegal fireworks manufacturing units in the last few weeks. “With Deepavali only a few months away, I have asked Gautam Goyal, Virudhunagar Superintendent of Police, to intensify checks at fireworks industry to prevent such accidents,” Mr. Selvam said.

Meanwhile, the police said Ramprakash and Ramachandran, who owned the farmland and the irrigation well, had set up the fireworks manufacturing unit stealthily.

The Sivakasi East police have begun an investigation.

One killed, 20 injured as bus overturns in Kerala

The Hindu Bureau
MALAPPURAM

One passenger was killed and 20 were injured, three seriously, after a private bus overturned on National Highway no. 66 at Kuttippuram in Malappuram district of Kerala around 11 a.m. on Sunday.

The bus was on its way from Kozhikode to Thrissur when the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle.

According to local people, the bus first struck a road divider on the right before yawing to the left. As it rotated, its right side swung forward and slammed into a roadside retaining wall. The force of the impact overturned the bus and split it into two. The bus came to rest on top of a car parked on the service road. The car had remained there after it was damaged in an accident at

the same spot a few days earlier.

The deceased was identified as Vaishnav, a native of Peruvayal in Kozhikode district. He was reportedly travelling to Thrissur with his brother to attend a Public Service Commission (PSC) examination.

The injured were admitted to hospitals at Kottakkal, Valanchery, and Kuttippuram.

The police and the Motor Vehicles department have launched an investigation.

Surveillance video footage shows the bus veering left towards a service road opening, swinging around and slamming its right side into the retaining wall before overturning.

Local people said several accidents had occurred at the same spot in recent months. They alleged design flaws in the highway for the latest crash.



The wreckage of the bus being removed from the highway at Kuttippuram in Malappuram district of Kerala on Sunday. ANI

Shivakumar to convene MPs' meet in Delhi on State issues

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar has convened a meeting of all Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members from Karnataka in New Delhi on Monday to discuss the State's pending proposals before the Centre and seek bipartisan support for securing Central assistance during the ongoing Monsoon Session of Parliament.

The meeting will be held at Karnataka Bhavan, with all MPs from the State having been invited.

Speaking to presspersons in Bengaluru on Sunday ahead of his visit to New Delhi, Mr. Shivakumar said the meeting would focus on issues concerning Karnataka's development and the need for



D. K. Shivakumar

MPs to collectively pursue them in Parliament.

“We want to present various issues connected to the State, and I hope all of them will work in the interest of Karnataka,” he said.

Drought situation

The Chief Minister said Karnataka was passing through a difficult period owing to the drought situa-

tion and expressed hope that the Centre would extend the assistance.

“We are going through difficult times because of the drought situation in Karnataka. We hope that the Central government will help us,” he said, adding that he would brief the State's MPs on the issues to be taken up with the Union Government.

Stating that there was a dire need for everyone to work together in such a time of distress, he said there were hopes of the Centre extending its aid to the State.

Mr. Shivakumar will travel to New Delhi on Monday afternoon along with former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president B.K. Hariprasad.

A.P. govt. promises to resolve Bhogapuram airport land issues

K. Srinivasa Rao
VIZIANAGARAM

Andhra Pradesh Minister for MSME and NRI Affairs Kondapalli Srinivas and other senior officials have assured farmers that the government will address the pending issues of those who surrendered their land for the Greenfield International Airport at Bhogapuram in Vizianagaram district.

The assurance comes ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to the airport on August 1. While compensation and the rehabilitation

and resettlement (R&R) package have been settled in most cases, a section of the affected farmers is yet to receive the benefits.

The government had initially offered compensation of ₹48 lakh an acre for land acquired for the approach road connecting National Highway-16 with the airport. However, some farmers demanded up to ₹1 crore an acre, citing prevailing market rates.

The government is learnt to have deposited the amount with the tribunal in Visakhapatnam, asking farmers to claim it through the court process.

Kerala Forest Dept. maps elephants straying into human habitats, fields

C.P. Sajit
KANNUR

The Forest department in Kerala has begun profiling individual elephants that repeatedly stray into human settlements, in an effort to better understand their movement patterns and improve conflict mitigation in north Kerala.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Chief Conservator of Forests (Northern Circle) B.N. Anjankumar said the decision to monitor and profile wild animals, particularly elephants, was taken in view of the growing incidents of human-wildlife conflict, especially in Ara-



The decision to monitor and profile wild animals was taken in view of the growing incidents of human-wildlife conflict. FILE PHOTO

lam farm, Kannur, and areas adjoining the forest fringes.

He said Rapid Response Teams, field staff, and forest watchers are docu-

menting habitual straying elephants through photographs, videos, and field reports after officials observed that some animals follow predictable beha-

vioural patterns, including entering human settlements, particularly when human activity is at its lowest, feeding in agricultural areas, and returning to the forest before daybreak.

Mr. Anjankumar further pointed out that wild animal intrusions into human settlements, especially in Aralam, Kottiyoor, and other forest fringes, consistently peak during the early monsoon months of July and August. He backed the claim by stating that the trend is based on incident data collected over several years, though the exact reasons require detailed scientific study.

Sitting MLAs among Kerala leaders facing sexual abuse charges

Deborah Thambi
KOCHI

Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) leader and former legislator M.C. Kamaruddin, who has around 120 cases pending against him, tops the list of people's representatives facing criminal proceedings in Kerala.

Mr. Kamaruddin was one of the accused in the Fashion Gold Jewellery investment fraud of 2019. He was booked by invoking the provisions of the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes (BUDS) Act, 2019. Five people's repre-

sentatives – Kovalam MLA M. Vincent, former Kazhakkuttam MLA M.A. Vaheed, Thrissur MP Suresh Gopi, former Parassala MLA A.T. George, and Kunnathunadu MLA V.P. Sajeendran – are reportedly facing sexual harassment charges.

Former Koothuparamba MLA P. Jayarajan and former Kalliassery MLA T.V. Rajesh have murder charges pending against them.

The details of the pending cases against sitting or former MPs and MLAs emerged following a recent report submitted by the District Judiciary before the Kerala High Court.



Come what may: Youth celebrate the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Sunday. SUDHAKARA JAIN

Pradhan’s exit is only the beginning, say youth at victory rally

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Students and several youths gathered at Freedom Park to celebrate the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday. As cheers and slogans criticising the Union government rang through the air, they insisted that the movement for education reforms was far from over. Speakers and demonstrators stressed that their demands extended beyond a single resignation and called for transparent and honest processes going forward. Senior medical professional Ramesh Bellamkonda said, “This [the Minister’s resignation] is a small victory in a big battle,” urging students to continue pressing for systemic re-

forms. Ashutosh, a demonstrator, said the protests had shown that the young people could make their voices heard. “It looks like we have made sure that the government knows that they cannot mess with the youth. If we want something as a nation, we will get it.” Anahita, another demonstrator, described the resignation as an important milestone rather than the end of the movement. “It is just one step in the right direction, but it is not over. We have reached a point where the momentum needs to keep going to make a bigger difference,” she said. The gathering was organised by the All India Students’ Association, whose leaders also sat on a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi.

Tejashwi Yadav demands release of brother, others

Bihar’s Leader of Opposition warns of massive agitation if protesters are not released in 24 hours; seeks govt. action against police personnel who ‘opened fire at students’ at Siwan and Jehanabad

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Lashing out at the State police for the arrest of hundreds of agitators during the Bihar Bandh, Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav on Sunday demanded the immediate release of students, Opposition MLAs, and other protesters, including his elder brother Tej Pratap Yadav. If they are not released within 24 hours, he warned the State government that they would hit the streets once again.

The Bihar Bandh was called by the All India Students’ Association (AISA) on Saturday. It turned violent in places and resulted in clashes with the police, who opened fire in Siwan, while hundreds were arrested. Among those arrested was Mr. Tej Pratap, who is no longer a member of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and has formed his own political outfit. He was arrested by the Patna Police on charges of obstructing government officials from discharging their duties and sent to judicial custody for 14 days in Beur Jail. “The Centre decided



Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav meets an injured protester at a hospital in Patna on Sunday. ANI

yesterday to withdraw all the cases against the protesting students and youth [in Delhi]. The [Bihar] government should follow suit,” Mr. Tejashwi told presspersons at Patna airport, where he was accompanied by his mother and former Chief Minister Rabri Devi. “Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary must release everyone, including my brother, within 24 hours or be ready to face a massive agitation, and students and youth will once again hit the roads to protest,” he added. The RJD leader also asked the government to

express their dissent and ideas, holding unchecked power accountable,” he said in a post on X after meeting the protesters. ‘Minors also arrested’ Disha Students’ Organisation member Soma Roy told *The Hindu* that many students have been arrested by the Patna Police, including some minors. “As many as 11 FIRs have been lodged against protesting students in different police stations in the State since July 22. Some of them are even minors, and their parents contacted me to check about their well-being. The State police must release them immediately as they have been wrongfully detained,” Ms. Roy said. Others who were arrested include Sandeep Saurav, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation’s Paliganj MLA and leaders of the AISA State unit, including president Dhananjay. Youth organisations announced that a Virodh Diwas, or day of protest, will be observed across Bihar on July 30, against the police action and the illegal arrest of student leaders, including the Mr. Saurav.

Suvendu ascribes Kolkata violence to ‘foreign extremists’

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA



Suvendu Adhikari

West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Sunday claimed that Islamic fundamentalists, possibly with the backing of foreign forces, had perpetrated the violence during protests in Kolkata on Friday. Protests against the NEET examination paper leak in Kolkata turned violent on Friday as protesters clashed with the police, prompting security forces to baton charge and fire tear gas shells to disperse the agitators. The police have arrested 14 persons in connection with the violence. The accused were produced before a city court which remanded them to two days in police custody. The counsel for the accused asked why people had been arrested in Kolkata while no cases were being registered against protesters across the country.

Cases by journalists All the cases had been filed by journalists who were assaulted by the protesters, the Chief Minister said. Out of seven cases, six have been filed by journalists. Several journalists were assaulted and heckled by the mob on Friday. Mr. Adhikari reiterated

the protests had nothing to do with the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) exam paper leak and about 70 persons were identified for their involvement in the violence. “They have nothing to do with the movement. They are not even students. They are Islamic fundamentalists. Investigators are probing whether any foreign force is behind them,” he said. The people behind the violence were upset with the decisions that the “nationalist government here has taken to implement the law for the last 10 weeks,” Mr. Adhikari said. Mr. Adhikari had earlier said that the Goonda Act, a new law with provisions for preventive detention of up to 12 months, had been invoked against the accused.

‘Pradhan had offered to quit at start of protest’

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Minister and BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya has claimed that Dharmendra Pradhan had offered to resign as the Union Education Minister at the very beginning of the student agitation over the NEET paper leak, but was asked by the party leadership to wait. Mr. Vijayvargiyasaid in Indore on Saturday that party president Nitin Nabin had asked Mr. Pradhan not to resign until a decision was taken on the matter by the party’s top leadership. He also claimed that the resignation “foiled plans of foreign forces that wanted to create unrest” in India.

Odisha BJP leaders criticise post by MP’s daughter on Pradhan

Press Trust of India
BHUBANESWAR

A social media post of BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi’s daughter Archita Sachin Rahar allegedly celebrating the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as the Union Education Minister has sparked resentment in the party ranks in Odisha. Ms. Rahar, in an Instagram post, which had a photograph of Mr. Pradhan in the backdrop of the national flag, wrote, “Dharmendra Pradhan resigns amid massive student protests over NEET leak fiasco.” State BJP leaders, including her mother, on the other hand, expressed sympathy for Mr. Pradhan. Ms. Sarangi, a two-time MP from Bhubaneswar

was, however, unavailable for comment. Sources said the lawmaker had asked her daughter to remove the post after getting a phone call from Mr. Pradhan’s office. However, it failed to have an impact. BJP leaders criticised Ms. Rahar over her post. Jagannath Pradhan, a BJP leader, said, “Mr. Pradhan is son of the soil. His resignation has hurt us. Odias have welcomed the daughter of Bihar (Aparajita) and made her MP twice.” “Ms. Sarangi should have control over her family members. She should tender an apology to Odisha for her daughter making adverse remarks against Mr. Pradhan,” he added.

M.P. man booked over ‘abusive’ reel on Pradhan

The Hindu Bureau
BHOPAL

A social media content creator has been booked in Madhya Pradesh’s Niwari district for allegedly using “highly abusive” language against former Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the BJP and the Delhi Police in a video clip amid the student agitation. According to the police, the accused, Yashpal Soni, a social media influencer, was booked on July 23 over an Instagram reel he had posted and has been questioned in the matter. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Niwari Superintendent of Police Ray Singh Narwaria said that the video was “way out of the purview of freedom of expression.”

Assam CM plays down Minister’s daughter joining CJP protest in Guwahati

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has sought to play down the participation of the daughter of one of his Cabinet Ministers in a Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) protest in Guwahati on July 23. Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Keshab Mahanta was trolled after videos of his daughter Dibisa Mahanta shouting slogans at a CJP protest against alleged irregularities in the NEET exam went viral. One of the slogans took a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Himanta Biswa Sarma

she “may not follow her father’s political ideology”. “Tomorrow, when my son practices law, he may defend someone whom I may not like. The actions of children should not be linked to their parents once they become adults,” Mr. Sarma told presspersons on Saturday. ‘Will speak to her’ “I do not agree with the slogans she raised. When I meet her, I will speak to her about it and try to make her understand that it was not the right thing to say,” he said. Mr. Mahanta is one of two AGP Ministers in the BJP-led Assam government.

Bengali actor booked over ‘derogatory’ poster on PM

Senjuti Sengupta
KOLKATA

Multiple first information reports (FIRs) have been lodged against actor Sreelekha Mitra across West Bengal for allegedly carrying a poster with an objectionable cartoon of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a students’ rally in Kolkata on Friday. “We witnessed hooliganism during the protest, including attacks on journalists. Meanwhile, displaying a poster depicting the Prime Minister in such a derogatory manner cannot be tolerated under any circumstances,” BJP leader Keya Ghosh, who lodged an FIR against the Bengali actor in Kolkata on Sunday told presspersons.

BJP using unfair campaign practices ahead of Bankipur bypoll, says Prashant Kishor

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Ahead of the Bankipur bypoll scheduled for July 30, founder of the Jan Suraj Party (JSP) and its candidate for the bypoll Prashant Kishor launched a scathing attack on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday. The BJP was using the district administration to harass his party leaders and deploying ‘Jeevika Didis’ for campaigning, Mr. Kishor alleged. He would undertake a sit-in protest outside the office of the State Election Commission if these practices were not stopped within 24 hours, Mr. Kishor said. Patna District Magistrate Kundan Kumar, in an official post on Saturday, “once again repeated the



Prashant Kishor

same objectionable practice we witnessed in November 2025”, Mr. Kishor said. Under the guise of promoting voter awareness, Jeevika Didis, who are employed by the State government, were tasked with telling women that they would stop receiving welfare benefits, including ration and pension, if they did not vote for the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or the BJP, he

alleged. “It is not enough for the DM (District Magistrate) to simply delete a tweet (social media post). He must issue an order stating that no woman associated with ‘Jeevika’ nor any employee or semi-government worker, can be part of the election process. The Patna DM committed a shameful act through an official tweet,” Mr. Kishor said, addressing a press conference here. On July 25, the Patna district administration posted a message from its official X handle at 9.56 a.m., featuring visuals of a Jeevika Didi at a door-to-door voter awareness campaign in Bankipur Assembly constituency, with the BJP’s flag visible in the background. This post was deleted after a few hours.

The reframing of the political narrative by Gen Z

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

“All is well.” The line from *Three Idiots* became an anthem of optimism for an entire generation. The film portrayed the story of three friends trying to break free from the rigid expectations imposed by India’s education system. Aamir Khan played Rancho, whose real identity in the film was Phunsukh Wangdu, an engineer and innovator living in Ladakh. The character was widely believed to have been inspired by innovator-turned-activist Sonam Wangchuk, who later emerged as the face of the anti-paper leak protests at Delhi’s Jantar Mantar. Ironically, the protest site represented the exact inversion of the film’s celebrated refrain. Students and young people from diverse social and economic



Protesters celebrate at Jantar Mantar after Dharmendra Pradhan resigned as Education Minister on Saturday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

backgrounds gathered to send a simple message: all was not well. Their objective was not merely to force the government to acknowledge their concerns over recurring examination paper leaks, but also to assert that their individual stories mattered and deserved to be heard. If the government was the protesters’ primary target, a section of the mainstream media became the second. Reporters from television channels were booed and heckled for pro-

moting what the protesters saw as a biased narrative. For much of the BJP’s time in office, critics have accused sections of television news of amplifying the government’s narrative. At Jantar Mantar, that criticism found its most visible expression. Posters of several television anchors were displayed, with some protesters branding them “anti-national”. What made the scenes at Jantar Mantar particularly noteworthy was that this sentiment was being artic-

ulated by Gen Z, a generation often perceived as politically detached. Their rejection of sections of the mainstream media ought to prompt introspection within news organisations. The protests acquired a sharper political edge after the police action on July 20, involving personnel of the Rapid Action Force and the Delhi Police. Images of students being dragged away and allegations of excessive use of force transformed what began as a movement against paper leaks into a broader expression of youth anxiety about fairness, opportunity and accountability. “The people of the country have started claiming their country back from those who have tried to destroy the Constitution, from those who have tried everything to suppress the voice of the people,” Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said. Whether or not one agrees with such a political

characterisation, the protests acquired a significance beyond education reform. **BJP’s tasks ahead** Successive electoral victories have given the BJP an aura of political invincibility, encouraging many of its supporters to ridicule the Opposition with ease. But the government quickly recognised the changing mood, opened channels of communication with the leaders of the protest, and signalled that it was willing to engage. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself reached out to young people through video messages on Instagram, the social media platform most widely used by Gen Z. The immediate protests may have ended, but the larger political challenge remains. The BJP’s task is not merely to resolve the issue of paper leaks. It is to regain the trust of Gen Z, a demographic that has played a crucial role in propelling the party to power.



Workers paint over slogans and graffiti on a wall near Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

A day later, traces of protest removed from Jantar Mantar

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

On Sunday, posters were brought down and graffiti were covered with paint at Jantar Mantar, which hosted a 36-day agitation that culminated on Saturday with the resignation of former Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET question paper leak and other issues.

New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) officials said that they had conducted a cleanliness and beautification drive at the venue and 60 tonnes of waste had been removed from the site.

The protest drew thousands of protesters, many of them students, and spilled out of Jantar Mantar

on to Tolstoy Road, eventually all the way up to Sansad Marg on one side and Janpath Road on the other. NMDC Vice-Chairperson Kuljeet Singh Chahal said from Saturday night, over 500 officers and employees took part in the drive, undertaking cleaning, washing, repair, and restoration of roads, footpaths, central verges, green belts, walls, and other public spaces.

Seventy-five sanitation workers had been deployed throughout the night, while 35 additional workers joined in the morning. The drive was supported by eight auto-tippers, two heavy trucks, one earthmover, and three high-pressure jetting machines.

Who approved assault on students, asks Rahul

Congress leader seeks accountability from Home Minister for ‘the use of lethal force, including pellet guns’ against students in Delhi; Opposition likely to demand PM’s apology in Parliament

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has sought accountability from Union Home Minister Amit Shah for the “barbaric assault on students who were peacefully protesting in Delhi” on July 20. In a letter on Saturday, he asked Mr. Shah whether the latter had authorised the use of “lethal force”.

Opposition parties are likely to raise this issue in Parliament on Monday and demand an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, sources told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Gandhi said peaceful protest was crucial to any democracy and it was the government’s responsibility to protect protesters and resolve their grievances through dialogue.

The Congress MP said the students were demanding a fair and accountable education system, but instead of being heard, they were assaulted by security forces with indiscriminate force, including lethal weapons and tear gas.

“Hundreds have suffered serious injuries. Women students have been assaulted by policemen, including by deliberately targeting their private parts. Most shocking has been the use of lethal pellet guns,” Mr. Gandhi said in the letter, a copy of which was posted on his X handle on Sunday.

He mentioned meeting 19-year-old student Sahil Lochab, who could lose his eyesight because of pellet gun wounds.

“As Home Minister, did you approve the use of lethal force including pel-



Rahul Gandhi speaks to media on the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in New Delhi on Saturday. @INCINDIA

lets under Rule 267 seeking suspension of business to discuss “use of excessive force on student protesters during NEET examination protest”.

Trinamool Congress’s Sagarika Ghosh said, “It is extremely shocking that that such extreme coercive measures were taken on unarmed students and youth. Government needs to give us answers on who authorised the use of pellet guns.”

Asked if the RAF was authorised to use pellet guns, G.P. Singh, Director-General, Central Reserve Police Force, told *The Hindu*, “Now, since agitation has been called off, and assembled people have dispersed, we would make a professional post-event assessment, like we do after every major assignment, and then let you know the view of the Force Headquarters.”

Asked if the Opposition would disrupt proceedings in Parliament, Mr. Gandhi said it would be decided in the meeting of Opposition leaders on Monday morning.

(With inputs from Sobhana K. Nair and Vijaita Singh)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said that the country, youth, and students are far more important than any position for BJP workers and the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan exemplifies this principle.

His remarks came after Mr. Pradhan resigned on Saturday amid mounting pressure from the protests over NEET question paper leak.

“The Modi government respects the sentiments of the country’s youth and is committed to implementing the necessary reforms against paper leaks,” he said in a post on X late on Saturday night.

“For the BJP, the nation, our youth and students hold far greater importance than any position,” he said.

The decisions taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure strict punishment for those guilty of paper leaks are commendable, Mr. Shah said.

“I am fully confident that these steps will ensure complete justice for the students who succeeded in

Students are more important than any post: Home Minister

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI



Amit Shah

the NEET examination,” the Home Minister said.

‘Significant reforms’

Mr. Shah said Mr. Pradhan had brought about significant reforms in the effective implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), arrangements for examinations in mother tongues, expansion of PM SHRI Schools, promotion of digital education, skill development, and strengthening industry-academia coordination during his tenure.

“His efforts toward making the examination system more inclusive and student-centric have also been noteworthy. His tenure is a testament to his dedication to the resolve of making India a developed nation,” he said.

At Mumbai rally, people happy with Pradhan’s exit, but slam govt. on E20

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

On a rainy Sunday morning, Shubham Shyam, 32, held a *dafali* (traditional hand drum) and stood outside Mumbai’s iconic Shivaji Park, celebrating the resignation of Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. “It is time to rest, reset, and then take down Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari,” he declared.

“We will party for two weeks, then we will play the sugarcane game,” Mr. Shyam added, hinting at criticism faced by Mr. Gadkari over the implementation of E20, or ethanol-blended petrol.

Mr. Shyam’s thoughts were echoed by other protesters. Aarsh, 25, a content writer, and Rohan, 19, a B.Tech. student, both said “E20 kills vehicles and people’s pockets”. Mr. Rohan said, “Since 10th grade, I have seen fuel prices skyrocket, and now vehicle mileage is poor, and pure petrol is expensive. Why give us a cheaper E20 option? Make petrol cheaper,” said Mr. Rohan.

They were participating in a victory rally called by Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray. Thousands of Gen Z and millennials gathered at the rally to celebrate the success of the protest spear-



People at the ‘victory rally’ at Shivaji Park in Mumbai to celebrate the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

headed by the Cockroach Janta Party, raising slogans such as “Our right, keep it here”, “*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*”, “This country is ours, and we belong to this country,” and calling for the resignations of Mr. Gadkari and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Uddhav slams PM

Mr. Uddhav Thackeray advised Prime Minister Narendra Modi to pay attention to the country, instead of engaging BJP Ministers and MPs to engineer defections. “India has come together; caste, religion, and every other divide is vanishing. It is no more BJP versus the Opposition, but BJP versus the country,” said Mr. Thackeray. Mr. Raj Thackeray expressed his gratitude to Mumbai and the Maharashtra Police,

saying, “You are not like the Delhi Police. This is your victory.”

Standing next to a row of yellow barricades, animator Mansi Worlikar, 26, and her friends were holding a placard taking a dig at Mr. Modi, who in a recent Instagram video had called the youth his “friends”. Ms. Worlikar said, “The victory feels personal, because we fought an impossible mountain and made the crack.”

For her friend, entertainment writer Urvashi More, 27, it was an eye-opener that she could have a political opinion and even voice it. “Something in me has moved; I now know that my political opinion matters,” said Ms. More.

Tushar Gandhi, great-grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, also joined the vic-

tory party. He said that the youth of the country had chosen their path. “However, the challenge is to make every issue a mass issue and not allow the government to confine it to a particular community, caste, or economic group,” Mr. Gandhi added.

‘Showing up matters’

The party atmosphere appeared complete with Bluetooth speakers belting out popular Hindi songs and the Gen-Z swaying to the music. In one such group stood Tarini, 23, who said, “We are not saying the system has changed, but there is hope for change. Showing up does matter.”

For Anam Khan, 21, a teacher from Sion, the protest felt like a lesson on humanity. “I never felt this equal with Hindus, Jains, or any other community. We saw instances where we were about to get detained and ran holding each other’s hands without thinking whether the other person was Hindu or Muslim. That is the beauty I saw here.”

Gia, 23, said, “The result is a cosmetic makeover, but at least now we know people in India vote with emotions. But we will vote logically, on facts.”

This is a new beginning in seeking accountability from our leaders, Ms. Tarini added.

Hunger strike was challenge to govt., the movement is still on, says AISA secretary

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Six of them sat on a hunger strike, a little away from the main dais at Jantar Mantar where the spotlight was on activist Sonam Wangchuk. Three of the six were still around when Mr. Wangchuk was forcibly shifted to hospital by the police on July 18. On July 25, when Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced his resignation, they were still there at the protest venue.

The members of the All India Students’ Association (AISA) had sat there for 23 days, as doctors took their blood pressure, conducted ECGs, and pricked their arms for blood tests.

The AISA was among the many student organisations reached out by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), which headlined the protests against exam question paper leaks. Other Left student bodies were also associated with the protests, including the Students Federation of India (SFI), the All India Students Federation (AISF), and the Krantikari Yuva Sangathan (KYS). Many in the Left circles questioned the political affiliations of this newly minted organisation, the CJP, born on social media. Many dismissed it as a



Neha

“pressure valve” that would function to dissipate the discontent.

Neha, Delhi secretary of AISA, the student body of the Communist Party of India (ML) Liberation, said that her organisation too was cautious. She was among the three AISA activists who sat on the hunger strike. But the apprehensions were set aside for two reasons. One, she said, “if those of us with experience of running mass movements such as these are around, we won’t allow anyone to hijack the agenda.” Second, this protest held great potential to reach out to young people who have so far been served only communal politics, she said.

During those 23 days, though her stomach was empty, her heart was filled, with people walking up to her. “Many of them came to me apologising,

saying that I had to go hungry since they voted for the BJP. Many even cried.” The experience that has stayed with her is that of the weeping father of a NEET student who died by suicide. “He said he had voted for the BJP and made everyone in his family vote for the BJP,” Ms. Neha said.

‘Not about self-sacrifice’

“It was never about self-sacrifice. It was rather a challenge to the government. The question was: will the government let us waste away slowly rather than forcing their Minister to resign?” She said that Mr. Pradhan’s resignation was only the first of the many to come. The protest at Jantar Mantar may have ended but the movement has not, she said.

The SFI and AISF sat on hunger strike from July 18-20. SFI president Adarsh M. Saji said his organisation’s idea was to take the protest beyond Jantar Mantar. “We organised protests in 24 States,” he said.

“We didn’t have any confusion about the ultimate goal of this protest. It was clear that it went beyond slogans; it was an agitation to regain democratic space that has been ceded in the last 12 years,” CPI(M) Rajya Sabha leader John Brittas said.

RSS women’s wing seeks uniform policy on population

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Rashtra Sevika Samiti, the women’s parallel of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), on Sunday adopted a resolution expressing concern over what it termed “population imbalance” in the country, urging the Centre and State governments to formulate a uniform national population policy applicable to all communities.

The resolution was passed at the organisation’s Akhil Bharatiya Pratidinhi Sabha (All India Representative Council), held at Samalakhya and was headed by Samiti chief V. Shantha Kumari.

Arguing that population was not merely a statistical measure but determined a nation’s future and identity, the resolution stated that while India’s population growth rate had declined due to decades of population control measures, demographic changes among religious communities had created an imbalance that warranted a review of the existing population policy.

“The growing demographic imbalance in India is not only eroding the country’s identity but is also posing a threat to India’s very existence,” the resolution read.

Sonam Wangchuk to be discharged from hospital today; to pay homage at Rajghat

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk will be discharged from Medanta Hospital in Gurugram on Monday and will visit Rajghat to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi before leaving for Ladakh, his team said.

Mr. Wangchuk, who is recovering in the hospital after he broke his 26-day

After the visit, he will return to Ladakh, according to members of his team

fast late Friday night, is expected to be discharged at around 11.30 am on Monday.

He had paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat, on June 28, before

launching his indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar here to support students protesting alleged irregularities, such as question paper leak, in the recently held NEET medical entrance examination.

Mr. Wangchuk had joined the agitation on June 28 and remained on an indefinite fast for 26 days. He was forcibly shifted to Safdarjung Hospital

on July 18, where he said he felt like he was being kept in detention. Following a Delhi High Court order, he was shifted to Medanta Hospital.

The 36-day agitation, led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), ended on Saturday with the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan as Union Education Minister. The protest had begun on June 20.

Student groups aim to carry Jantar Mantar momentum into Delhi University union poll

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

With the protest drawing to a close, student organisations are preparing to shift their campaign from the protest site to the Delhi University campus as the new academic session begins on Tuesday.

The networking, visibility and political momentum built during the agita-

tion are likely to shape their outreach ahead of the Delhi University Students’ Union (DUSU) elections, which are due to be held six to eight weeks after the commencement of the session. Multiple student organisations maintained a visible presence at the protest site through tents and help desks. Leaders of the All India Students’ Association (AISA) emerged

as prominent faces during the hunger strike, while the All India Students’ Federation ran a bookstall at the centre of the site. Volunteers from Aam Aadmi Party’s (AAP) Association of Students for Alternative Politics, the Krantikari Yuva Sangathan and the Students’ Federation of India helped manage logistics.

Anjali, an AISA leader and DU student, said,

“Some of the most important issues in the country were raised at Jantar Mantar. We will definitely centre our DUSU campaign around this.”

AISA intends to “tap into the resistance and understand what caused so much anger”, she said.

Sources in AAP said its students’ organisation would contest the election this year.

INBRIEF



Assam flood toll hits 66; CM asks BJP workers to give donations

The ruling BJP government in Assam has sought funds from its party workers to provide relief to flood-affected people, as the death toll reached 66 by Saturday night. On Sunday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that clothes would be distributed to 4 lakh women and children from Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, and Golaghat, the four severely affected districts, in that order. “The BJP will require ₹12 crore to undertake this relief measure. I appeal to our party workers in and outside Assam to contribute to this noble cause,” he said. Mr. Sarma advised BJP workers to hand over donations of up to ₹2,000 to the local MLA.

3 Great Indian Bustard chicks placed in rewilding tunnel

In a first, three chicks of the endangered Great Indian Bustard have been moved into a custom-built rewilding tunnel at the Godawan Conservation Centre in Ramdevra, Jaisalmer. The ₹9.25-crore facility prepares captive-bred birds for life in the wild by minimising human contact and copying their natural habitat. The Great Indian Bustard is the State bird of Rajasthan. The chicks will remain in the tunnel for about four months under CCTV surveillance. The food will be provided without direct human contact. Following the rewilding phase, the chicks will be released into Desert National Park. PTI

India scaling new heights in defence production: PM

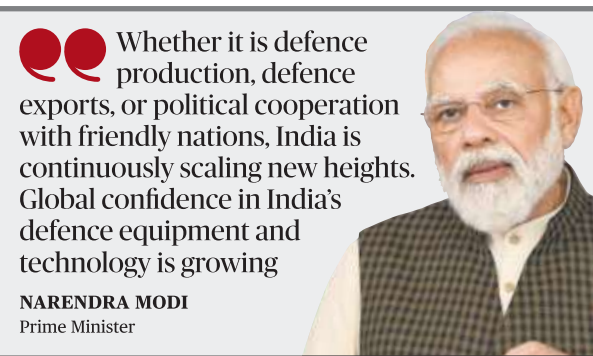
India is continuously strengthening its technological capabilities, says Modi in *Mann Ki Baat* address; he lauds Indian sportspersons, students for their achievements in respective fields

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India is continuously scaling new heights in defence production, defence exports, and political cooperation with friendly nations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday in the latest episode of *Mann Ki Baat*, his monthly radio address.

Mr. Modi also paid tributes to the soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the Kargil War in 1999.

India was continuously strengthening its technological capabilities, he said. Citing the induction of *INS Mahendragiri* into the Indian Navy, he said the modern warship had been designed and built in India. More than 75% of the materials used in it are indigenous. “It is a symbol of the growing strength of an ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’.



also successfully tested the Kusha missile,” he said.

“Whether it is defence production, defence exports, or political cooperation with friendly nations, India is continuously scaling new heights. Earlier this month, I was in Indonesia, where a major agreement regarding Brahmos and Astra missiles was concluded. Global confidence in India’s defence equipment and technology is growing,” Mr. Modi said.

Remarkable feats

Wishing the Indian contingent the very best for the Commonwealth Games, which began in Glasgow a few days ago, the Prime Minister said people across the country hoped that the

players and athletes would perform exceptionally well and make the nation proud. “Our youth have achieved remarkable feats in sports recently. P.V. Sindhu has become the first Indian to win the Japan Open title in badminton; the entire nation is proud of this achievement of hers,” he said.

He said the Indian women’s cricket team had won the first-ever women’s Test match at Lord’s in London. “This is a historic victory. But that is not all. In the long history of Lord’s, this was the first Test match played by a women’s team. It was on this very ground that India won her first Cricket World Cup in 1983. Now, our ‘Nari

Shakti’ has brought glory to the nation there,” he said.

Mr. Modi said “our young friends” were also bringing glory to India in the field of science. “Olympiads in Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics were held just this month. The Indian contingent delivered a spectacular performance in these competitions. In the Physics Olympiad, all five of our students won gold medals, and India secured the top rank,” he said.

“In the Chemistry Olympiad, too, all our students won gold medals. All our students also won medals in the Biology Olympiad, including a gold medal. In the Mathematics Olympiad, our students secured two gold and four silver medals. I am immensely proud of the nation’s youth power. It is heartening to see the culture of Olympiads and Hackathons steadily growing in India. I am confident that more and more young people across the country will show interest in such forums and keep the flag of India flying high,” he said.

Youth have decisive role in shaping the future of India: Modi

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday urged young Indians to play a constructive role in nation-building by connecting with border villages through the Viksit Vibrant Village Programme 2026.

He expressed confidence that India’s youth would play a decisive role in shaping the country’s future. He said that when young people connect directly with the nation’s challenges and opportunities, the country’s future becomes stronger and brighter. The statement comes a day after youth-led protests forced Dharmendra Pradhan to resign as the Education Minister.

Interacting with participants of the programmes, Mr. Modi welcomed youth representatives from around 250 districts and praised the growing reach of the Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) platform, which, he said, has expanded to include crores of young citizens engaged in national development initiatives.

Highlighting the role of the youth in shaping India’s future, Mr. Modi said

MY Bharat volunteers have demonstrated their capabilities through programmes such as the Viksit Bharat Dialogue and the Viksit Vibrant Village Programme.

He said connecting young people with the realities of rural and border regions helps broaden their understanding of the nation and strengthens their commitment to public service.

Recalling the programme’s origins during the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue, Mr. Modi said more than 400 youth were selected from nearly three lakh applicants to visit border villages in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Ladakh.

The initiative, he said, was designed to introduce participants to local culture, understand the aspirations of border communities, and witness the dedication of India’s armed forces.

Emphasising the importance of border villages in India’s development journey, Mr. Modi said the government’s approach has shifted from treating them as the country’s “last villages” to recognising them as the “first villages” of India.

Dialogue with Pakistan will only be on PoK, says Defence Minister

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said the success of Operation Sindoor demonstrated India’s capability to respond to every “misadventure” by Pakistan with overwhelming force, while reiterating that there would be no dialogue with Islamabad except on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Addressing the 27th Kargil Vijay Divas commemorations at the Kargil War Memorial in Dras, Mr. Singh asserted that PoK is an integral part of India under Pakistan’s illegal occupation and warned that any attempt to undermine India’s sovereignty would invite a decisive response from the armed forces.

“The success of Operation Sindoor is proof that India possesses the capability to respond to Pakistan’s every misadventure



Rajnath Singh pays tribute to fallen soldiers of 1999 Kargil War on 27th Kargil Vijay Divas, at Drass, in Ladakh on Sunday. IMRAN NISSAR

with a severity far beyond its imagination,” he said, adding that India no longer distinguishes between terrorists and the governments that support them.

Accusing Pakistan of making terrorism a part of its state policy, Mr. Singh said the country’s military works in tandem with terrorist organisations.

He contrasted the trajectories of the two neighbours, saying India is focused on innovation,

semiconductors, space technology and digital payments, while Pakistan continues to promote terrorism, infiltration, radicalisation and proxy warfare.

Free hand to forces

Mr. Singh said the Indian government has given the armed forces a free hand to respond decisively to threats and expressed confidence that no adversary would dare cast a hostile

eye on India while its soldiers guard the borders.

Paying tribute to the soldiers who laid down their lives during the 1999 Kargil War, including Param Vir Chakra awardees Captain Vikram Batra and Captain Manoj Kumar Pandey, Mr. Singh described Kargil Vijay Divas as a symbol of sacrifice, service and national unity. He urged every citizen to imbibe a soldier-like spirit of discipline, patriotism and readiness to serve the nation.

Highlighting progress in defence indigenisation, Mr. Singh said India now manufactures nearly 65% of its defence equipment domestically, compared to importing 65%-70% when the present government assumed office.

Earlier, he laid a wreath at the Kargil War Memorial and flagged in the Shaurya Vijay Yatra motorcycle rally as part of the commemorations.

Inflation control remains RBI’s foremost priority, says Governor

Raghuvir Srinivasan
Thomas K Thomas
K. Ram Kumar
Mahesh Ravidas Navak
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)’s recent measures to attract foreign capital have garnered strong investor response, with banks mobilising nearly \$32 billion, largely through Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank), or FCNR(B), deposits, while government securities have attracted more than \$7 billion in foreign inflows since the June policy measures, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra has said.

In an interview with *The Hindu BusinessLine*, Mr. Malhotra dismissed concerns that the inflows merely represent a recycling of existing deposits. He added that the RBI has adequate tools to manage any resulting liquidity. The inflows have strengthened



Sanjay Malhotra

India’s external position amid heightened geopolitical uncertainty and volatile global capital flows, he said.

Responding to concerns over the RBI bearing the hedging cost of fresh FCNR (B) deposits and offering concessional forex swaps for external commercial borrowings (ECBs) by public sector entities, Mr. Malhotra said: “It is not something which should be a matter of concern because

we have a foolproof system of insuring ourselves. So, whatever dollars we get, the excess foreign currency is invested in foreign assets.”

Mr. Malhotra said the measures should be viewed in the context of challenging global conditions facing emerging markets and are expected to further strengthen India’s balance of payments and currency stability.

‘Rupee not overvalued’ Mr. Malhotra also sought to reassure markets on the rupee, arguing that recent depreciation does not reflect any weakness in the country’s economic fundamentals. According to him, pressure on the currency has largely stemmed from geopolitical tensions, dollar strength and broader volatility across emerging markets.

“We do not target any specific exchange rate or

band for the rupee. Our intervention, whenever necessary, is targeted to curb excessive volatility,” he said, adding that the currency is “not overvalued” and could even be considered undervalued in both nominal and real effective exchange rate terms.

On monetary policy, Mr. Malhotra reiterated that inflation control remains the RBI’s foremost priority even as it remains mindful of growth risks. He said the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) will continue to adopt a data-dependent approach while navigating the evolving growth-inflation trade-off.

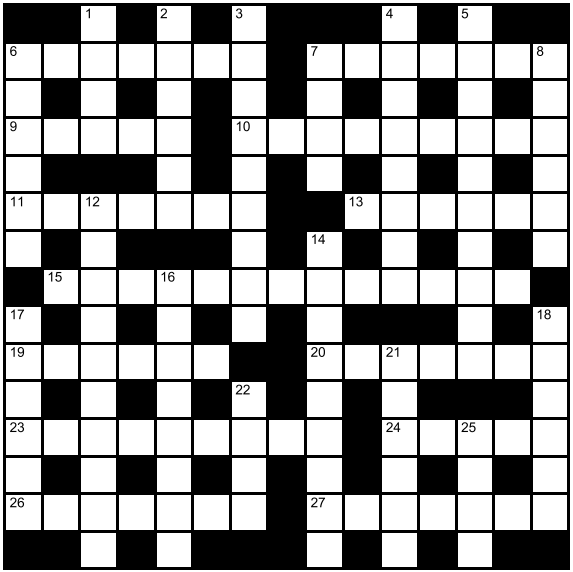
“Our primary mandate is inflation and price stability. Therefore, we will do whatever is required first, to keep price stability and then, to see to what extent we can support growth,” he said.

(The writers are with *The Hindu BusinessLine*)

THE CROSSWORD+ 14856 (set by Bruno)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at <https://thehindu.com/crosswords>

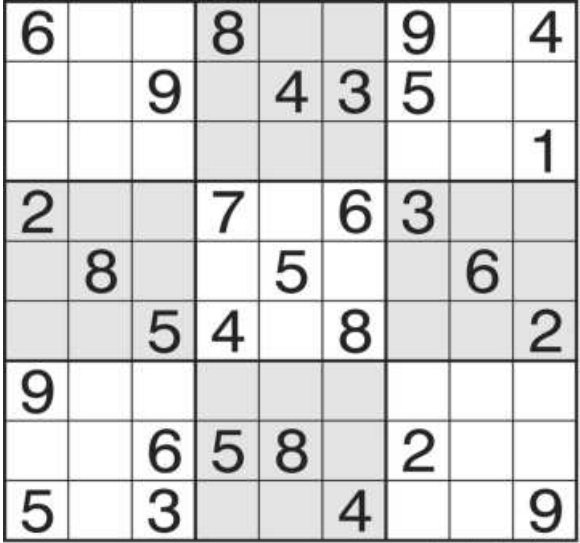
SCAN TO PLAY



- Across
- 6 College’s appeal to get girl fired causes uproar (7)
 - 7 Upset as Southern township disappears mysteriously (7)
 - 9 Artificial intelligence confuses oil for sauce (5)
 - 10 Yahoo taken in by scoundrel here regularly, that bird-brain! (9)
 - 11 Green sea bubbles round America — with no form (7)
 - 13 Improve menu by removing first item — and putting in place on the counter (4,2)

- 15 Engine’s top injures people often, when falling (3,10)
 - 19 Communist seems exposed giving pay off (6)
 - 20 City girl mostly surrounded by girls outside work (7)
 - 23 Encourage counterfeit notes, essentially to be hidden (9)
 - 24 It might bail out one? (5)
 - 26 Hint of hardness in one building material (7)
 - 27 With Siri, this Christmas symbol can be arranged religiously (4,3)
- Down
- 1 Root of black oppression, mainly (4)
 - 2 One could start a chain reaction in fashion — I’m oddly aroused (6)
 - 3 Rigour in case of emergency arising during prison riots (9)
 - 4 Jars of drinks containing fish (5-3)
 - 5 Dancer’s goal — release a sad lullaby (10)
 - 6 Mission: convert neutral to become radical (6)
 - 7 One money for all boomerangs (4)
 - 8 Free of former partner’s influence, sweetheart’s finally liberated (6)
 - 12 One has to stay under that quietly during idle times, perhaps (5,5)
 - 14 Famous psychiatrist’s support led to setter’s recovery — it’s a childhood thing (6,3)
 - 16 Jump to conclusion that half of jury is consumed by power and greed when assembled (8)
 - 17 Credit is India’s major problem (6)
 - 18 Morning — daylight’s beginning to come off canopy (6)
 - 21 Fertile horse with large, great heart (6)
 - 22 Very alcoholic drink... causes depression (4)
 - 25 Lazy creep avoids society (4)

SUDOKU



Solution to previous puzzle

Solution to yesterday’s Sudoku

FAITH

Life lessons from Ramayana

Epics and various holy texts not only educate but also elevate a person’s mental and spiritual well-being and should be perused daily. A reading of the Ramayana, for example, is recommended for one at any stage in life. The Ramayana is a treatise on so many aspects of life. It showcases devotion; highlights how to pursue dharma in everyday life. It is also a commentary on the ideal family, said Damodara Deekshithar. It is a commentary on family structure, and nothing much has changed since the time Perumal manifested as Rama. The structure remains the same and many challenges in life are similar: the way parents interact with one another, the manner in which a spouse conducts himself or herself, the way siblings react to a situation and the reaction of children to various challenges. In the material world, one always struggles to balance the family with right conduct (dharma). What the Ramayana imparts is a unique lesson. When Kaikeyi tells Rama, “Your father told me to tell you to go to the forest,” Rama politely interjects at once saying, “You do not have to say my father said so... even someone on the road can tell me,” and immediately starts making preparation to honour the banishment orchestrated by Kaikeyi, in order to gain the kingdom for her own son, Bharata.

When Dasaratha bemoans the turn of events, Kausalya tells him, “Why are you getting agitated now? You wanted to keep Kaikeyi happy, therefore you banished Rama.” Dasaratha then says he has sinned and brought about this unbearable parting from son upon himself.

In the Mahabharata, Vyasa says one should not let go of dharma under any circumstances.

India’s first dengue vaccine arrives with a crucial safety caveat

Qdenga could be responsible for enhancing dengue in children who have not had an infection yet in their lives; in such cases, the vaccine could simulate a primary dengue infection in the body, resulting in protection against DENV-1 and DENV-2 infections but not against a DENV-3 infection

Swaminathan S

India’s drug regulator just approved the country’s first dengue vaccine, Qdenga. It is designed and claimed to protect against the four serotypes of the dengue-causing virus, called DENV-1 to DENV-4. Young children as well as adults (aged 4-60 years), irrespective of whether they have had dengue before, may be vaccinated with Qdenga.

More than 40 countries have already approved Qdenga, which is manufactured by the Japanese pharmaceutical company Takeda. That said, data from clinical trials that Takeda published in 2019, 2020, and 2024 on the vaccine’s efficacy raise a specific concern about its abilities.

Rationale of dengue vaccines

All the four DENV serotypes are prevalent in India. Each serotype is different from the other such that an immune response to one may not necessarily protect against another. A person who has experienced a natural dengue infection will carry antibodies to the specific DENV serotype in their serum, and the person will be said to be seropositive. A person who has not been exposed to a natural DENV infection will not carry dengue antibodies and is said to be seronegative.

When a seronegative person contracts a first DENV infection for the first time, they will develop antibodies to that particular DENV serotype. When this person, seropositive for that particular DENV serotype, suffers a second infection by another DENV serotype, there is a non-zero chance that they may experience severe dengue. This is because the antibodies produced against the first DENV serotype may actually enhance infection by the second DENV serotype. This is called antibody-dependent enhancement (ADE).

The holy grail of dengue vaccines is to avoid ADE. Any safe and effective vaccine for dengue must be ‘tetravalent’ – meaning it must target all four DENV serotypes simultaneously and equally. If a dengue vaccine fails to protect against even one serotype, it will keep the door open to ADE in future.

It is quite clear that the efficacy and safety of a dengue vaccine are linked to each other as two sides of the same coin. And Qdenga’s phase-3 trial efficacy data need to be understood through this lens.

Phase-3 trial

Takeda set up a large phase-3 trial involving around 20,000 healthy children (4-16 years old) across eight Latin American and Asian countries where dengue is endemic to assess Qdenga’s safety and efficacy. The results from this trial were first published in 2019, with additional data published in 2020 and



The efficacy and safety of a dengue vaccine are linked to each other as two sides of the same coin, and Qdenga’s phase-3 trial data need to be understood through this lens. GETTY IMAGES

2024. Around two-thirds of the children in the trial received Qdenga while the remaining third received a saline solution. Then the researchers compared the vaccine efficacy between the two groups. The efficacy was defined to mean the ability of Qdenga to prevent dengue infections and resultant hospitalisation.

If the vaccine worked as intended, one would expect fewer cases of dengue in the vaccinated group versus in the unvaccinated group. And this was true. In the vaccinated group, five children out of 1,000 contracted a DENV infection while in the unvaccinated group, 24 children per 1,000 contracted a DENV infection. This translates to an overall efficacy of about 80%.

Overall, Takeda’s investigators stratified their participants into seropositive and seronegative groups before administering the vaccine. The efficacy was about 82% and 75% in these two groups, respectively. These seem like solid numbers – but the devil is in the details.

‘Variable VE’

If you look at the results stratified by DENV serotype as well, a particular granular detail, which could actually be a potential safety signal, emerges. In children who were seronegative prior to vaccination, those susceptible to DENV-3 infection were noticeably more numerous in the vaccinated group than in the unvaccinated group. In other words, seronegative children vaccinated with

The consequences of contracting a secondary DENV-4 infection by seronegative children cannot be predicted since we do not know of Qdenga’s efficacy against DENV-4; in India, the number of such children facing this risk could be very large

Qdenga were 25% more likely to be infected by DENV-3 relative to unvaccinated children.

The number of DENV-4 cases during the trial were so low (in the seropositive group) or totally absent (in the seronegative group) that the efficacy of Qdenga for DENV-4 is essentially unknown. The efficacy was high against DENV-1 and -2, irrespective of the serostatus at baseline.

The investigators had consistently noted these observations in Takeda’s 2020 and 2024 papers as well.

They also persistently referred to this feature of their vaccine as “variable VE against the different serotypes” and described it as a “numerical imbalance” in the number of dengue infections.

The data clearly demonstrate that Qdenga does not offer protection against DENV-3 and could in fact actually be responsible for enhancing dengue in children who have not had a dengue infection yet in their lives. In such cases, Qdenga – being a live dengue vaccine – could simulate a primary dengue

infection in the body, resulting in protection against DENV-1 and DENV-2 infections – but not against a DENV-3 infection.

And if such children were to contract a natural DENV-3 infection, they will have a 25% higher likelihood of falling sick, as this will be a secondary dengue infection linked to potential ADE.

Need for screening

The consequences of contracting a secondary DENV-4 infection by such children cannot be predicted since we do not know of Qdenga’s efficacy against DENV-4. At a conservative estimate of 40 million children in India, with only under 30% of them estimated to be seropositive for dengue, the number of seronegative children facing this heightened risk could be very large.

In a paper in *Nature Medicine* on July 25, researchers from Imperial College London modelled the health impact of Qdenga in a population and concluded that it would be safer for seronegative recipients – especially children – to be screened for prior dengue exposure before receiving the shot.

In sum, ignoring the DENV-3 safety signal in seronegative children could be a costly and avoidable mistake, and should be avoided through screening.

S. Swaminathan is retired professor of biology from BITS Pilani-Hyderabad and a former scientist in the area of dengue vaccinology at ICGEB, New Delhi. (ssn225@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Qdenga is designed and claimed to protect against the four serotypes of the dengue-causing virus, called DENV-1 to DENV-4

Data from clinical trials that Takeda published in 2019, 2020, and 2024 on the vaccine’s efficacy raise a specific concern about its abilities

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BIG SHOT



Experts from the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts use a portable X-ray fluorescence analyser to examine the pigments, material composition and condition of centuries-old frescoes during their scientific documentation and conservation at Amer Fort, in Jaipur, Rajasthan, on July 24. PTI

WHAT IS IT?

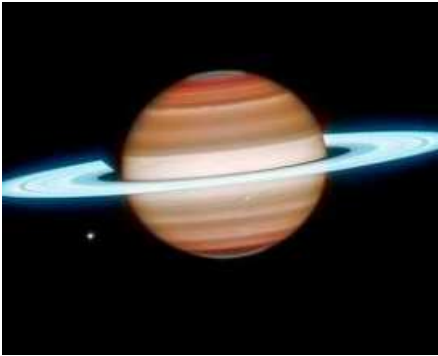
PRAXIS: grazing planet rings

Vasudevan Mukunth

PRAXIS is an acronym of ‘Planetary Rings Autonomous Exploration with In-situ Sampling’. NASA has just selected a mission concept called ‘PRAXIS’ for its Innovative Advanced Concepts (NIAC) 2026 phase I funding.

The mission will consist of a bio-inspired robotic explorer driven by an artificial intelligence (AI) model. It will be capable of directly sampling particles from planetary ring systems – something no mission has ever attempted before. The mission’s selection for NIAC was guided by open questions in the science of planets’ rings that NASA’s Planetary Science Decadal Survey has flagged as important.

These questions include how planetary rings form, how they evolve, and what ring particles are made of. Rather than fly through a ring – which would pose collision hazards – PRAXIS currently plans to just graze the ring plane. Specifically, once it has picked a target particle, the spacecraft will perform a touch-and-go sample of the particle’s surface using a long deployable boom, staying at a safe distance from the moving ring particles. Once it has a sample, the craft will move on to another region or gap in the rings to sample from another area. When it has a sample, small instruments will snag free-floating particles and the



James Webb Space Telescope’s view of Saturn’s atmosphere. SPACE TELESCOPE SCIENCE INSTITUTE/NASA

AI model will help measure particle size, porosity, and composition. Being selected for NIAC phase-I finding means the PRAXIS team can start running simulations and studying system design. If the idea advances to phase II, the team can start building a physical prototype. According to its developers, the PRAXIS sampling system can be used in missions to study many ringed planets.

For feedback and suggestions for ‘Science’, please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject ‘Daily page’



In the days ahead, the impact of the protests will be far wider than what the government hopes to restrict it to. Over the years, the Narendra Modi-led BJP government has converted mostly narrow electoral victories – a plurality of votes yielding a majority of seats, singly or in coalition – into expansive mandates. It has used them to break the constitutionalist consensus on settled questions of secularism and federalism, advancing a unitary, majoritarian agenda by creeping degrees. It has simultaneously raised its floor of support by radicalising sections in the north, west and now the east of India on the communal plank, which has in turn helped secure its legislative strength. It has recast dissent as anti-national or separatist and hollowed out the Opposition through induced defections and selective deployment of enforcement agencies. Combined with the pusillanimity of other institutions, including a passive judiciary, this has led to what many describe as a managed democracy living under an undeclared emergency for civil liberties. A nation born of non-violent struggle has needed, more than once since Independence, a non-parliamentary convulsion to turn its institutions back towards the vision of the freedom-fighting generation that framed the Constitution. The CJP, and those who stood with it – Sonam Wangchuk fasted for 26 days – have shown that a just demand, pressed through the quintessentially Indian route of satyagraha, can outlast the state's brutality and move an inflexible government to action. This is a lesson for the institutions charged with checking the executive, and for those charged with questioning authority, especially the media, which – barring some notable exceptions – have mostly played a negative role. They must play their constitutionally mandated and socially responsible role rather than give in to browbeating or expediency. Whether they do so will be tested as the government sets about reforming the entrance examination system with a different Minister in charge. What is certain is that India is yearning for change and rejuvenation.

By advocating a return to the pre-2020 status quo, these economic actors choose to selectively forget a dozen years of relentless, unprovoked aggression by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The list of Beijing's hostile acts against Indian sovereignty is not a series of isolated border skirmishes; it is a coherent strategy of containment and



Realising that Washington is an unreliable partner does not mean India must run into the arms of an actively hostile neighbour

And then there is economic coercion. China has routinely used its manufacturing dominance as a political weapon, abruptly withholding critical machinery and industrial inputs, even weaponising its monopoly over rare earths and tunnel-boring machines during bilateral disputes simply to inconvenience Indian industries and signal its leverage, knowing fully that India has none to exercise in return. Most alarming has been Beijing's overt, coordinated military support for Pakistan during Operation Sindoor (May 2025). By providing Islamabad with real-time tactical satellite data and intelligence, China transformed itself from a mere military supplier into an active, hostile participant in Pakistan's security architecture against India. To ignore this track record in pursuit of cheaper components is not pragmatism; it is strategic blindness.

For over a decade, China has weaponised its veto at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to shield Pakistan-based terrorist organisations from international sanctions and condemnation. It has blocked India's legitimate aspirations for permanent membership in the UNSC and membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). If India opens the floodgates to Chinese capital and market access without any fundamental resolution of the border dispute or a halt to Beijing's hostile behaviour, it effectively subsidises its own encirclement. Pouring billions of dollars into Chinese coffers as a compliant consumer market merely expands the asymmetric trade deficit (China's annual surplus over India now exceeds \$100 billion). More dangerously, it hands Beijing an economic kill-switch over the Indian economy. In a future crisis, the threat of cutting off critical components could paralyse Indian industry,

India is undeniably in a complex position. The Trump administration's unpredictable shifts mean that relying entirely on Washington as a security guarantor is unwise, despite the enthusiasm of his emissary to India, Sergio Gor. The United States will always prioritise its own domestic and global calculations, and New Delhi must remain clear-eyed that it stands alone on the heights of Ladakh. However, realising that Washington is an unreliable partner does not mean India must run into the arms of an actively hostile neighbour. There is an immense strategic space between subordinating India's national interests to the U.S. and conceding an unconditional economic and political surrender to China.

We do not have to “tilt” either way. We must, instead, develop the strength to walk straight.

Courage against unchecked power
The greatest threat to authoritarianism is when it is taken too far and to such sectors that cannot and will not tolerate it anymore. This has been a protest not just against the NEET debacle, but also against the authoritarian rule that prevails. From the heart of a man known to be completely apolitical, and who has judged each issue on the strength of its own right or wrong, unmindful of whether the ruling dispensation or the Opposition is to blame, all I can say is – may this swing against authoritarianism spearheaded by the youth succeed, so that we can all truly say 'Ja Hind'.

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

Indian Monsoon: a democratic tipping point

India stands at an important moment in its democratic journey. Large student demonstrations which were demanding fairness in examinations and Sonam Wangchuk's prolonged fast and hospitalisation along with the start of the Monsoon session of Parliament have together captured the nation's attention. These events viewed together tell a larger story. They signal a growing desire and demand among citizens to be heard, to participate, and shape India's democratic future.

This moment can be described as the Indian Monsoon.

Just as the annual monsoon follows months of intense heat, societies too experience seasons when accumulated aspirations, frustrations, and exclusion seek peaceful democratic expression. Such moments should not be feared. They should be welcomed as opportunities for reflection, dialogue, reform and redesign.

On imagining a future

India has much to celebrate. The country has expanded digital public infrastructure, modernised transportation, strengthened financial inclusion, and demonstrated achievements in science, technology, and space. These accomplishments have brought recognition for India.

At the same time, many young Indians worry about the credibility of competitive examinations, access to quality education, and the availability of meaningful employment. Farmers continue to face economic uncertainty and income inequality remains a major concern. Public discourse has become increasingly polarised, with many citizens questioning institutional autonomy, the role of the media, the undermining of civil society, and the quality of democratic debate. These concerns should not be viewed through a partisan lens. They should be understood as democratic signals.

The strength of a democracy is measured not by the absence of



Sam Pitroda
Telecom inventor, entrepreneur, development thinker, and policy maker

Our future depends upon combining technological excellence with constitutional values, scientific temper, ethical leadership, and respect for humanity

criticism but by its willingness to listen and reform.

India's greatest asset has always been its extraordinary diversity – of languages, religions, castes, cultures, traditions, trade, ideas, and aspirations. The Indian Constitution transformed that diversity into the foundation of national unity. It affirmed that justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity are not just abstract ideals but practical principles for governing a vibrant society.

As India moves toward the centenary of its Independence in 2047, there is an opportunity to renew that constitutional promise. The real question is: what kind of India do we want to build for the next generation? Do we aspire merely to become a larger economy, or do we seek to become a more inclusive, more equitable, more scientific, more innovative, more peaceful and compassionate society?

This Monsoon moment calls for a new national agenda.

The government must restore complete confidence in our education and examination systems. It must create millions of meaningful jobs by encouraging decentralisation, district-level development, entrepreneurship, innovation, and local manufacturing. It must also strengthen public healthcare, improve nutrition, low-cost housing, safety, security, schools, vocational training, invest in scientific research, reduce bureaucracy, and expand technology and opportunities for every young Indian, regardless of their background.

Above all, India must prepare for the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is not simply another technological revolution. It will reshape and redefine work, education, healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, communities, villages, cities, governance and employment.

India possesses the raw young talent, entrepreneurial spirit, and digital foundation to become a global leader in AI for public good.

Its challenge is to ensure that technology serves every citizen sustainably. No algorithm can replace trust and no AI system can replace human wisdom.

Our future therefore depends upon combining technological excellence with constitutional values, scientific temper, ethical leadership, and respect for humanity.

The idea of India

Perhaps, the greatest challenge before India today is not economic or technological. It is philosophical – the idea of India rooted in our Constitution. That ideology needs to be the core of our development, and the prerequisite for a path to prosperity. For far too long has the world measured success primarily through the pursuit of power and profit. The time has come to rebalance our priorities: to place people and the planet at the centre of development. If we empower every young person, reduce inequality, strengthen democratic institutions, focus on humanity and not religion, and use technology to expand opportunity rather than privilege, India can offer the world a new developmental model – one that combines economic progress with human dignity.

The Indian Monsoon is therefore not a political movement. It is a democratic season of renewal. It reminds us that governments derive strength by listening to their citizens, and that India's greatest achievements have always come when we have chosen dialogue over division.

History will judge us by whether we had the wisdom to listen, the courage to reform, and the imagination to build an India worthy of its civilisational heritage and its democratic promise.

If we seize this moment with humility, confidence and vision, the Indian Monsoon will not merely mark another season of public debate. It will mark the beginning of India's next democratic renaissance.

A gamble on the Cauvery issue

CM Vijay aims to hold direct talks with Karnataka for water-sharing

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) president C. Joseph Vijay's decision to initiate talks with his Karnataka counterpart D. K. Shivakumar on the Cauvery issue marks a departure from the State's traditional policy over the Cauvery dispute.

The purpose of Mr. Vijay's visit to Bengaluru is to impress on the upper riparian State the imperative for it to release the share of water due to Tamil Nadu, as stipulated in the final award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) in 2007 which was amended by the Supreme Court 11 years later. Between June 1 and July 23, the State should have realised around 32 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft) of water but what it got was about 3.5 tmc ft. Keeping in mind the deficient rainfall from the southwest monsoon over the river's catchment and its own formula of proportionate reduction, Tamil Nadu feels that it should have received at least three tmc ft more.

A new strategy

Mr. Vijay's outreach has evoked disapproval from many political parties, farmers' leaders, and experts alike, as direct negotiations, in their assessment, would amount to bypassing the established implementation mechanism – the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee – as per the final award and the Court's judgment. Besides, Tamil Nadu has been, since the CWDT's establishment in June 1990, a strong votary of adjudication to resolve the vexatious pro-



blem of sharing river water in contrast to its neighbour's preference for talks. On several occasions, it had outrightly spurned offers for talks made by various leaders of Karnataka. In the last 35-odd years, there were occasions when the State took part in bilateral and multilateral discussions but this was part of the Supreme Court's intervention.

Even though the CWDT's formation itself was an outcome of the failure of 26 rounds of negotiations held over 22 years, Mr. Vijay seems to be receptive to the idea of chalking out a path that his predecessors did not favour. What should be helpful to him is that in Karnataka, the ruling party is the Congress, a junior partner in his coalition government. The Congress' former president, Rahul Gandhi, was a prominent attendee at Mr. Vijay's swearing-in event in May. Further, Mr. Shivakumar himself was among the early leaders from other States to greet Mr. Vijay on becoming the Chief Minister. It is possible that the TVK chief has thought of capitalising on his equations with Mr. Shivakumar and the Congress party to break new ground in the Cauvery problem.

At the same time, Mr. Vijay should know, by now, that personal relationships and striking a deal on contentious and long-standing disputes are two distinct matters. After all, many of his predecessors,

especially M. Karunanidhi and M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), had equally good, if not better, ties with their Karnataka peers such as Veerendra Patil, D. Devaraj Urs, R. Gundu Rao, Ramakrishna Hegde, and J.H. Patel. Rao had even invited MGR, according to diplomat-political writer R. Kannan's biography on the latter, to join the Congress after his exit from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in 1972.

Nine years later, MGR, as Chief Minister, visited Bengaluru in October 1981 originally for a day's talks with Rao but had to extend his stay by one more day. Even then, no breakthrough was achieved.

It is well known that when it came to the Cauvery, the upper riparian State's Chief Ministers would give substantive nothing to the other side.

Clubbing of issues

What is also troubling several parties and groups in Tamil Nadu over the proposed talks is the possibility of the Karnataka government using this occasion to raise the Mekedatu dam project, which the lower riparian State has been opposing on the ground that it will jeopardise its irrigation requirements. There is substance in their apprehension but Tamil Nadu has to convey to Karnataka that it can have talks separately, as and when necessary, as it has sought the formation of an exclusive tribunal to handle the subject. For the time being, its focus is on obtaining immediate relief from Karnataka in terms of water release.

If the two States go beyond and agree on a distress water-sharing formula which can be presented to the CWMA for ratification, it will be a real feather in Mr. Vijay's cap.

ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in

Need to shift focus to rising student suicides, cost of education

As the protests led by the CJP end, larger systemic issues associated with high-stakes entrance examinations such as NEET need to be addressed

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

The sustained protests led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) demanding accountability over paper leaks in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) came to an end on Saturday with the government accepting many of their demands, including the resignation of Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan, compensation for the families of the deceased who ended their lives over the NEET paper leaks, and the withdrawal of criminal cases against protesters.

Thousands of protesters who gathered across many places in the country despite crackdown by the government, including brutal police action in Delhi on July 20, have termed Mr. Pradhan's resignation a 'historic win'. While their demands have successfully pinned accountability for a leaked question paper, larger questions around high-stakes entrance exams – the NEET in particular – such as the proliferation of coaching centres, increased expenditure for families, and high levels of stress experienced by students, remain unaddressed.

Over 20 lakh students appeared for NEET in the first week of May. Reports indicate that more than a dozen students died by suicide after the exam was cancelled and rescheduled due to widespread allegations of question papers getting leaked. These suicides cannot be seen in isolation. The number of student suicides increased by about 80% from 8,068 in 2014 to 14,488 in 2024, the latest year for which the Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has been published.

Over 1.23 lakh students ended their lives between 2014 and 2024 in the country (**Chart 1**).

The Ministry of Education stated in Parliament that suicides

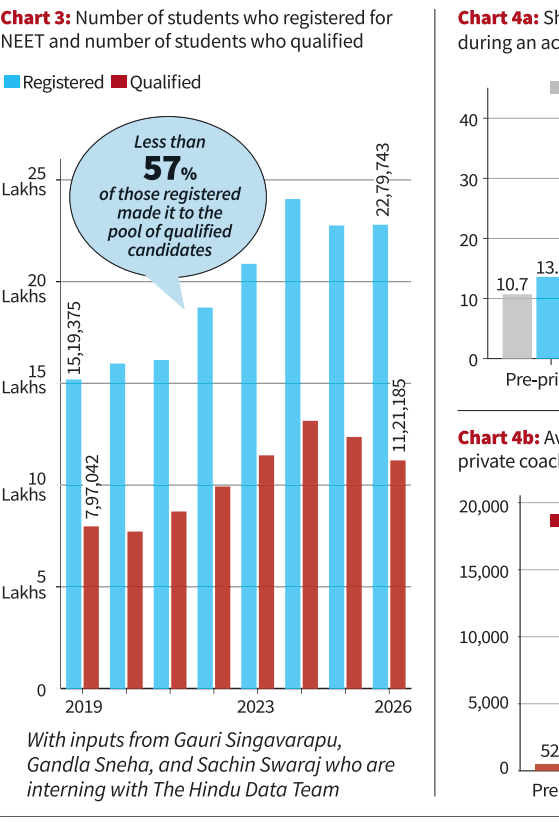
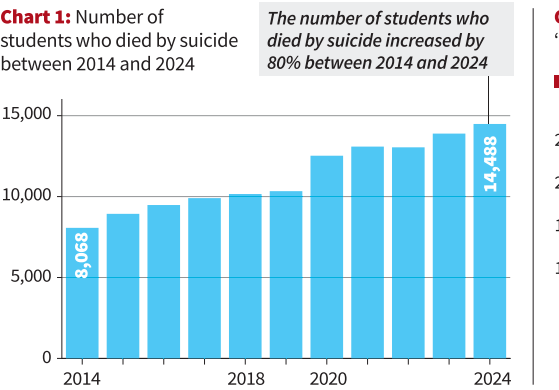
among students are driven by various causes such as academic stress, family problems, mental health issues, financial distress and interpersonal conflicts. The ADSI reports capture "failure in examination" as a distinct category of reason for suicides. Suicides for which "failure in examination" was the primary reason accounted for 21%, or more than one-fifth, of the total number of student suicides between 2014 and 2024. Over 2,000 students died every year due to failure in examinations, with 2021 being the only exception. Cumulatively, over 25,000 students died by suicide due to failure in exams between 2014 and 2024, of which 55% were under 18 years and another 42% between 18 and 30 years of age (**Chart 2**).

Though student suicides cannot be seen in the context of NEET alone, this highly competitive medical entrance exam has come to symbolise these systemic issues. The exam has repeatedly come under focus for issues such as paper leaks, inhumane levels of checking of students while entering exam halls, and concerns over unusually high-scoring patterns from select centres. Over 15 lakh students have registered for the NEET examination every year since 2015. However, those who made it to the pool of qualified candidates is less than 57% (**Chart 3**).

Moreover, the need to join private coaching and the reality that many have to repeat the exam after studying for another year or two to qualify have contributed to significant costs for households. More than 35% of secondary and higher secondary students attend private coaching. In fact, households' private coaching expenses is about a third of their entire education expenditure (**Chart 4**).

While the protests have come to an end, at least temporarily, these systemic problems await closure.

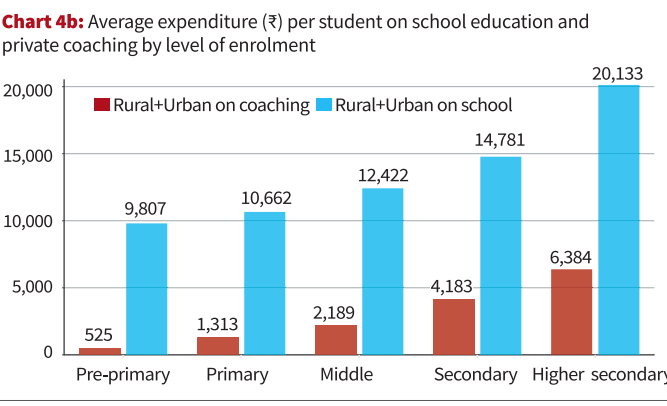
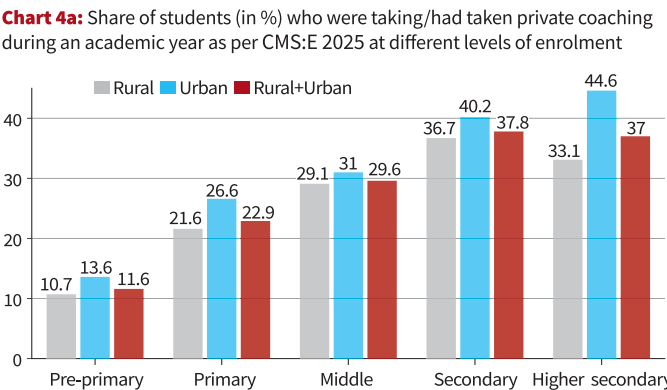
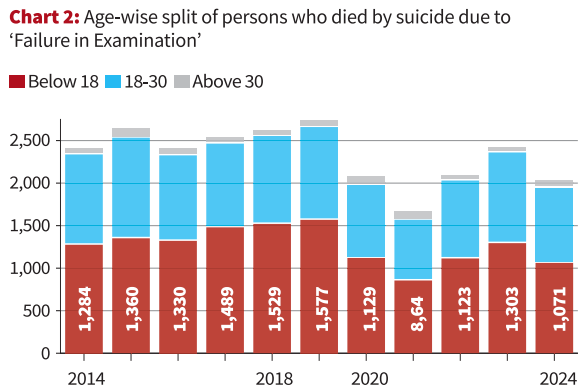
(Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available on Tele-MANAS 14416 and Sneha's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050)



Under pressure

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Testing Agency's press releases, the Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) reports, and Comprehensive Modular survey: Education 2025 (CMS:E 2025)

Carrying the flame: Supporters lighting candles to pay homage to the students who died by suicide after the NEET paper leak during the third day of protests by the Cockroach Janta Party, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on June 22. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA / THE HINDU



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 27, 1976

'Roman letter' on Mars rock

Pasadena (California), July 26: Commands relayed to Mars from U.S. scientists on earth apparently straightened out a hitch in Viking's soil-sampling arm yesterday.

But another key experiment the seismology probe, appeared to be beyond the reach of earth-bound repairmen.

Pictures from the Viking lander on Sunday showed a tiny lockpin lying on the Martian dust. That meant the pin believed to have caused the jamming of the soil sampler's arm, had fallen away as planned.

Late last week after the problem cropped up scientists discovered through a model of the lander at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) that by extending the arm a bit the problem pin would drop free. That was what happened yesterday on Mars, scientists said.

"Everybody is very happy about it and we are ready to move right along," said the Viking Project Manager, Mr. James Martin. "We are moving right on ahead."

New closeup pictures of the Chryse plain on Mars revealed what appeared to be a rock bearing the Roman letters "B" and "C" and the Arabic numeral "2". Scientists said the characters were optical illusions caused by shadowing.

"People are great at imagining things", said Dr. Carl Sagan. Dr. Bruce Murray, Director of the Jet Propulsion laboratory agreed.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 27, 1926

Growing chaos in China

An "Englishman" cable from London dated July 25, states:—

Mr. Percival London, cabling to the "Daily Telegraph" from Peking, declares that China is on the verge of bankruptcy.

He says it is difficult to describe the intense feeling of pessimism reigning among all classes. China is in a state of helpless chaos and local tyranny is blasting any hope of extricating any part of the country from the welter of militarism and corruption. The situation can only be retrieved if the slackness of Europe is abandoned and a genuine attempt made by the Powers to act unitedly.

The steady and impartial administration of the Customs under Sir Francis Aglen, enabling the collection of revenues, is the one bright spot in a gloomy pasture.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of Delhi schools found with safety deficiencies

774 Private schools accounted for the highest number of cases. According to a statement from Lok Nivas, 1,677 schools were inspected between July 13 and 24. Safety deficiencies were found in 270 government schools, 463 private schools and 41 government-aided schools. PTI

People still affected by the Assam flood situation

6.5 in lakh. The flood situation in Assam improved on Sunday as water levels were receding in most of the affected areas with those places not receiving overnight rainfall, even as over 6.5 lakh people remained hit in six districts and 66 people lost their lives in this year's deluge. PTI

People evacuated in South China due to Typhoon Noul landfall

3.4 in lakh. Typhoon Noul made landfall early Sunday and was bringing winds and heavy rain to southern China, including Hong Kong. China's weather centre said Noul made landfall along the coast of Huidong county of the city of Huizhou in the southern Guangdong province. PTI

Number of people evacuated from the biggest forest fire

2.2 in lakh. French authorities said that more than 2,20,000 people have been evacuated from the forest fire raging in the southwest of the country that has also forced the closure of highways and rail lines. More than 50,000 people have also been ordered to leave villages around Bordeaux. AFP

Maharashtra: share of SIR enumeration forms distributed

87.8 Maharashtra has distributed 87.79% of enumeration forms and digitised 60.44% of them under the ongoing SIR of electoral rolls, officials said. The enumeration phase is being carried out from June 30 to August 8. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why is China’s AI push gaining ground?

How have Chinese firms caught up with leading U.S. AI models despite chip restrictions? What advantages do Chinese open-source AI models offer over captive models? How has Beijing supported the growth? What challenges could China face in the future?

EXPLAINER

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

A matter of weeks after Anthropic's Fable AI model was launched to great acclaim, Chinese firm Moonshot AI released Kimi K3, a model that has measured up to the Claude model in most parameters. The notable factor here is that K3, and a clutch of other models made in China, are open-weight and/or open-source, meaning that any company (or well-resourced individual) can run them locally.

How is China positioning itself in AI?

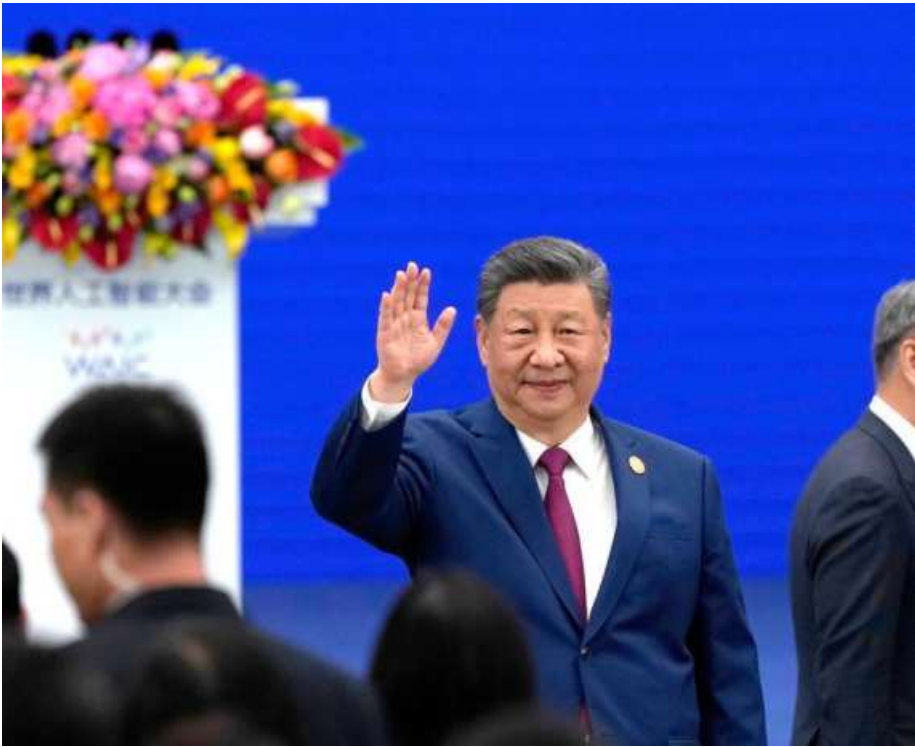
At the Shanghai World AI Conference on July 17, Chinese president Xi Jinping said that with AI, countries “should adhere to the principle of openness and win-win and boost innovation-driven development”. At least as far as the currently available open models are concerned, Chinese firms are walking that talk.

China faces crucial restrictions on graphics processing units (GPUs) that are required for training AI models and running queries (inference) on them. However, China has bridged this gap with abundant electricity access and a larger quantity of less advanced chips. The result is models like Kimi K3, which is a 2.8 trillion parameter model.

How have they built a competitive ecosystem?

Not all open-source models are designed for those many parameters; Alibaba, the retail and e-commerce giant that is now growing significant in-house AI capabilities, has put out several lightweight models that have impressed AI enthusiasts who prefer to run inference on their own hardware.

China has supported AI research labs as well as encouraged existing large firms like Tencent and Baidu to work on AI,



Gearing up: Chinese president Xi Jinping; China's results are indicative of long-term planning that it had set in motion for the AI ecosystem. AP

which has resulted in a multiplicity of models that have been downloaded millions of times from platforms like HuggingFace, with developers enthusiastically adopting these models for narrow, tailored use-cases.

One of the most well-known entrants that challenged U.S. dominance is the startup DeepSeek, whose models are available online as well as on an open-source basis. The Chinese government has also acted to protect these firms from being co-opted into the U.S.-led AI ecosystem, such as by restricting travel for key personnel and blocking Facebook parent Meta's acquisition of the firm Manus.

What does this mean for the global race?

The difference between open-source and captive models – Anthropic and OpenAI's

models, as well as most of Google's, land in the latter category – is that source code is not freely shared with the broader AI developer ecosystem, giving firms a theoretical edge. But another key difference that could counteract that advantage is that open-source models can be run by third-party providers who compete with others like them to provide greater cost predictability.

This is so far a theoretical advantage, since the U.S.'s frontier firms are greatly subsidising their models; Anthropic is this month giving out \$100 in credits to paying users to use their Fable model. But once that exuberance dies down, the focus may very well shift to infrastructure providers, who may find open-source models an attractive offering.

This is, of course, assuming that open-source models continue to be provided freely by Chinese firms in the

coming months and years. Alibaba has already started working on captive AI models that run on its own infrastructure and are not open-source.

Since open-source models are expensive to produce, it may not be a given that they will be trained at the same clip, as the companies most capable of making them may change business models.

Chinese firms have caught up in capability, but there remains a trust deficit, especially in India, on using their models. Open-sourcing models means that local firms running on inference aggregators like Neysa and even the IT Ministry's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-in) make use of these models, since no question of data leakage emerges.

The bet may very well be that once the open-source honeymoon ends, and the world has seen how good Chinese models are compared to the most advanced Western counterparts, captive models may get a second consideration, even allowing for the geopolitical baggage that comes with embracing Chinese technology.

Things may not necessarily move in that direction, as the existing models and their accompanying literature are being studied by researchers and labs around the world.

The geopolitical baggage has likely been a major reason why India, despite hosting the AI Impact Summit in February, skipped out on the Shanghai conference. The government is trying to encourage domestic champions and hold off Chinese capital in Indian AI by promoting firms like Sarvam AI in spite of scarce resources. However, as noted above, open-source models have not been discouraged.

China's results are indicative of long-term planning that its government had set in motion for the AI ecosystem.

The next major focus area, Mr. Jinping indicated in his speech, was AI “moving from the digital world into the physical world.”

THE GIST

China's open-source AI push has rapidly narrowed the capability gap with U.S. frontier models, backed by State support, efficient use of computing resources, and a growing ecosystem of developers and firms.

While open models could reshape the global AI market through lower-cost deployment, questions over long-term business models, geopolitical trust, and India's push for domestic AI champions will influence their adoption.

Why has India moved to take down BitChat repositories?

What is BitChat? Can communication tools be blocked for their potential misuse?

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Ministry of Home Affairs, directed GitHub on July 23 to remove repositories hosting BitChat, the Bluetooth mesh messaging application developed by X co-founder Jack Dorsey, stating that the app could be exploited to coordinate unlawful assemblies and circumvent lawful restrictions imposed by competent authorities during situations involving public order. The order comes at a time when repeated internet shutdowns near protest sites have led protesters to increasingly rely on Bluetooth-enabled messaging platforms such as BitChat for communication.

What is BitChat?

BitChat is a decentralised peer-to-peer messaging application that operates over Bluetooth mesh networks. It requires no

internet connection, no servers and no phone numbers.

Traditional messaging apps depend on centralised infrastructure that can be monitored, censored or disabled. BitChat creates ad hoc communication networks using only devices in physical proximity, with each device acting as both a client and a server, automatically discovering peers and relaying messages across multiple hops to extend the network's reach.

According to the platform, this approach provides censorship resistance, surveillance resistance and infrastructure independence. The network remains functional during internet outages, natural disasters, protests, or in regions with limited connectivity.

What does the order say?

The order directs GitHub to disable access to three repositories, including the Android application and its release files, within three hours.

It also warns that failure to comply

could invite criminal prosecution.

According to the order, the application enables anonymous communication without mandatory user registration, phone number verification or centralised logging of communications. It states that the application's technical architecture significantly impedes lawful interception, attribution and investigation by law enforcement agencies.

It further states that since communications occur directly between nearby devices through a decentralised mesh network, the platform can be misused to evade lawful surveillance, facilitate anonymous coordination and circumvent lawful restrictions imposed by competent authorities during situations involving public order, riots, terrorism, organised crime or internet shutdowns.

The order also states that “such decentralised communication platforms are capable of being exploited for coordinating unlawful assemblies, violent protests, dissemination of misinformation, radicalisation, criminal

conspiracies, and other activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, public order, and for facilitating the commission of cognizable offences.”

What does the law say?

The order, Notice No. 11072601011432, was issued at 11.16 p.m. on July 23 under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, read with Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Section 79(3)(b) provides that an intermediary may lose its safe harbour protection if, upon receiving actual knowledge or being notified by the appropriate government or its agency that any information, data or communication link residing in or connected to a computer resource controlled by the intermediary is being used to commit an unlawful act, it fails to expeditiously remove or disable access to that material without vitiating the evidence in any manner.

However, Section 79 itself does not confer a blocking power. Blocking directions are ordinarily issued under Section 69A of the IT Act and the Blocking Rules, 2009, which require a hearing and reasons recorded in writing, subject to review.

It empowers the Union government to direct the blocking of public access to information on grounds such as national

security, public order and the prevention of incitement to the commission of cognisable offences. Such orders are required to follow the procedure prescribed under the law.

Why is the order being criticised?

The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) criticised the order, arguing that it relies on the application's potential for misuse rather than identifying any unlawful content hosted in the repositories. “Anticipated misuse of a communications tool is not a lawful basis to prohibit the tool,” the organisation said.

The order directs GitHub to “remove and disable access to the concerned URLs within three hours of the issue of this communication without vitiating evidence in any manner.”

According to IFF, the notice, issued close to midnight, fails the proportionality standard laid down by the Supreme Court in *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* (2020).

In *Anuradha Bhasin*, the Supreme Court held that “the degree of restriction and the scope of the same, both territorially and temporally, must stand in relation to what is actually necessary to combat an emergent situation.” The court observed that the principle of proportionality requires restrictions to be tailored to the territorial extent of the restriction, the stage of the emergency, the nature of the urgency, the duration of the restrictive measure and the nature of the restriction.

CACHE



GETTY IMAGES

Why India must modernise the way govt. publishes laws and regulations

India’s legal publishing system remains fragmented and dependent on PDFs, making it difficult for citizens, lawyers and even courts to access, track laws and amendments in force; adopting open legal publishing standards would make laws more accessible and strengthen democratic participation

Sushant Sinha

When the Transvaal government enacted the notorious “Black Act” against Indians in 1906, Mahatma Gandhi’s first act was not to protest but to translate the ordinance and publish it in full in his newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, so that ordinary Indians could read for themselves exactly what was being done to them. Gandhi understood that a community cannot defend its rights against a law it cannot read.

Today a variety of laws govern us: Acts and their amendments, rules, regulations, BIS standards, road standards, circulars, municipal bylaws, and more. Yet there is no single place to find out what the law actually is – it lies scattered across multiple websites. The rule of law requires that Bills presented before Parliament or a State Assembly be made known to the people in advance, that citizens are aware of the laws and amendments in force, and that the judiciary knows the state of the law it adjudicates. In reality, Bills are often not placed in the public domain before they are introduced. Citizens struggle to find the law in force, and even when they locate a copy, determining what the law was on a given date is a battle of its own.

Lost in the gazettes
As a legal publisher, we were incorporating the changes made by the Code of Criminal Procedure

Govt. uses gazettes as its primary means of publishing laws and bringing them into force. These gazettes are published as PDFs, a format created in the early 1990s

(Amendment) Act, 2005 into the principal Act. The amendment left it to the government to decide when its various sections would come into force, so we began searching the gazettes for the notifications bringing them into effect. To our surprise, we could find no gazette notifying Sections 16, 25, 28(a), 28(b), 38, 42(a), 42(b), 42(f)(iii) and (iv), and 44(a). We filed an RTI application with the Ministry of Home Affairs, which confirmed that these sections have never been notified. In other words, more than two decades later, they are still not valid law.

The government uses gazettes as its primary means of publishing laws and bringing them into force. These gazettes are published as PDFs, a format created in the early 1990s to ensure that a digital document looks identical on every device by embedding fonts and images. While this makes PDFs easy to share and print, it also makes it very hard to extract the structure and meaning of a legal document. A law is inherently hierarchical – chapters, parts, sections, subsections – but a PDF exposes none of that hierarchy. Many gazettes published in regional languages contain proprietary fonts, which look fine on a PDF viewer

but cannot be searched in regional language or read on any websites.

Learning from global standards
Governments in several countries have moved to publishing laws in markup languages that properly capture their structure, semantics and the local languages. Many African countries have adopted the Akoma Ntoso standard, a markup language specifically designed for legal documents. They use an open-source legal publishing platform called Indigo, which allows users to add or edit laws. You can apply amendments to an Act and see precisely what changed across successive amendments – and what the law was at any given point in time. Subordinate rules and regulations can also be tagged to their principal Act and amended in the same way.

The United States publishes its laws in a variant of Akoma Ntoso called USLM (United States Legislative Markup). Every law and amendment is published in USLM, while the PDF and HTML versions are generated automatically from it using a stylesheet. All past issues of the Federal Register have also been converted and are available for bulk download. As a result, not only commercial legal vendors but also nonprofits, think tanks and others can use them to help citizens better engage with their democracy.

The United Kingdom publishes its legislation at legislation.gov.uk, run by The National Archives. The base format for the content is the Crown Legislation

Markup Language (CLML), another modified version of Akoma Ntoso. The National Archives has stated that it aims to move towards Akoma Ntoso because it is emerging as the international standard, is less complex, and is supported by a wider pool of experts and suppliers.

Making the law accessible
While the rest of the world has moved away from PDF publishing, we remain dependent on a standard that was built more than three decades back. Until we upgrade the government’s legal publishing software stack, access to the law will remain unnecessarily difficult for citizens, lawyers, judges and other stakeholders in a democracy.

The Internet itself was built on open standards. People came together to standardise communication protocols, which every stakeholder then adopted. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar often reminded us that a democracy needs more than a government “for the people”; it needs a government “by the people.” Laws are the raw material of our democracy, and leaving their publication to a handful of contractors will only deepen the obscurity. If instead the government consults its citizens and standardises legal publishing, it could transform how the state communicates with the people and make them an active part of democracy. (Sushant Sinha did his PhD in Computer Science from University of Michigan and is the founder of legal search engine, Indian Kanoon)

THE DAILY QUIZ

How well do you know Vincent van Gogh, one of history’s most celebrated and influential artists?

Prathmesh Kher

- QUESTION 1

Vincent van Gogh’s painting *The Starry Night* depicts the view from the window of which institution where he was staying?
- QUESTION 2

Which fellow artist did Van Gogh invite to live and work with him in the “Yellow House” at Arles?
- QUESTION 3

Van Gogh was deeply influenced by Japanese woodblock prints, a style collectively known by what Japanese term?
- QUESTION 4

What was Van Gogh’s profession before he decided to become an artist?
- QUESTION 5

Van Gogh died in July 1890 in which French village?



Visual Question:
This is generally believed to be the only painting Vincent van Gogh sold during his lifetime. Identify it. VINCENT VAN GOGH/PUBLIC DOMAIN

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:

1. This controversial law offering a path to Indian citizenship to six religious minority communities from neighbouring countries led to nationwide protests in 2019 and 2020. Name the law. **Ans: Citizenship (Amendment) Act**

2. In 2015, students of this education centre went on strike protesting the government’s appointment of a television actor-turned-politician as chairperson. What is the name of the education centre and the name of the appointee? **Ans: Film and Television Institute of India, Gajendra Chauhan**

3. A global pop star and a prominent climate activist posted on X in support of protests that

captured global headlines for days in India in 2021. Their posts sparked a reaction from the Indian government. Name them. **Ans: Rihanna, Greta Thunberg**

4. The 2016 death by suicide of this student drew attention to the fight against institutional caste discrimination. **Ans: Rohith Vemula**

5. What is the name of the judicial committee formed to recommend amendments to India’s criminal laws in the incident’s aftermath? **Ans: Justice Verma Committee**

Visual: Name the man and woman in the photo. **Ans: Anna Hazare and Kiran Bedi**

Early Birds: Tamal Biswas | Mohan Lal Patel | Parimal Das | Siddhartha Viswanathan | Sumana Dutta



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

She was dialled in during the presentation

Complaining all the time doesn’t become you

S. Upendran

“Nice shirt! Haven’t seen it before. New?”
“Bought it during last week’s sale. What do you think? Is it...”
“It becomes you.”
“The shirt becomes me?”
“When you tell someone that the ‘shirt becomes you’, what you’re suggesting is that the shirt suits him.”
“In other words, you’re complimenting the person.”
“Exactly! It’s usually used to suggest that something looks good on the individual. I think blue becomes you.”
“Meaning the colour suits me. According to my mother, white T-shirts become me.”
“That’s a good example! The expression can also be used to talk about someone’s behaviour. For example, making fun of people doesn’t become you because...”
“It’s probably another way of saying, you shouldn’t be making fun of others because when you do, it makes you less attractive.”
“Very good! I think you should stop complaining. It just doesn’t become you.”
“Displaying confidence becomes you.”
“While we’re on the subject of confidence, did your boss manage to convince the client?”
“The client was impressed with the presentation she made. The team said that they’d get back to us by the end of the week.”
“I was surprised your boss made the presentation.”
“The CEO asked her to do it. She did a great job. She was dialled in.”
“What do you mean by ‘dialled in?’”
“The expression is frequently used in informal contexts. When you say that someone is dialled in on a task, what you mean is that he is very focussed.”
“The person will do a good job.”
“Or at least he’ll attempt to. Whenever Sinner plays Djokovic, he’s dialled in.”
“At this year’s Wimbledon, he certainly was. There are many players who find it difficult to dial in if the opponent is weak.”
“The superstar turned down the role because he just couldn’t dial into the character he’d been asked to play.”
“Meaning that he just couldn’t get a feel for the character?”
“I guess you could say that.”
“Tell me, where does the expression ‘dial in’ come from?”
“The expression has nothing to do with the telephone. It has more to do with the old radio. In the past, you had to be careful when you tuned in.”
“That’s right! If you hadn’t dialled in properly, you got a lot of static.”
“So, you had to keep turning the knob till you found your specific setting.”
“The other day Sujatha was telling me that I had a face for radio. What did she mean by that?”
“How important is your face when you’re speaking into a microphone?”
“Not important.”
“Exactly! When you say someone has a face for radio, what you’re suggesting is that the individual is unattractive.”
“I see.”
“My friend has a great body. But unfortunately, he has a face for radio.”
“You can’t have everything in life, I guess.”
upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Aplomb:
complete poise, assurance, and self-confidence, especially in a difficult or challenging situation

Synonyms: calmness, composure, coolness

Usage: *She answered the difficult questions with aplomb.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/aplomb

International Phonetic Alphabet: /æplɒm/

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

Maritime sector posts remarkable growth



Smooth sail: Government initiatives such as Sagarmala and MAKV 2047 aim to expand port capacity. PAUL NORONHA

B. Swaminathan

India’s maritime sector has experienced remarkable growth in recent years as the country seeks to strengthen its role in global manufacturing, trade, and logistics networks. Government initiatives such as Sagarmala and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision (MAKV) 2047 aim to expand port capacity, improve multimodal connectivity, promote coastal shipping, and reduce logistics costs. Major investments are being made in new berths, deeper draughts, mechanised cargo handling, freight corridors, logistics parks, inland transport, and digital infrastructure to create an integrated maritime and logistics ecosystem.

However, infrastructure expansion alone cannot ensure sustainable development. Port capacity must be aligned with realistic cargo demand projections. Since port projects involve substantial capital investment and a long gestation period, inaccurate forecasting can result in significant operational and financial inefficiencies. Excess capacity leads to underutilised terminals and poor returns on investment.

Operational efficiency

In port planning, the concept of ‘highest efficient attainable throughput’ refers to the maximum cargo volume a port can handle efficiently without causing significant congestion. As traffic nears this threshold, berth occupancy rises, vessel turnaround slows, storage yards become congested, and cargo-handling equipment comes under pressure. Beyond this level, efficiency declines quickly, leading to higher logistics costs, supply chain disruptions, and reduced competitiveness.

To sustain efficiency, ports require timely capacity augmentation, operational modernisation, improved hinterland connectivity, and digital integration. While infrastructure expansion remains important, equal emphasis must be placed on optimising existing assets and improving operational performance. India’s major and non-major ports are already showing signs of capacity imbalance with them showing a combined handling capacity of nearly 2,762 million tonnes, while actual cargo traffic was about 1,668 million tonnes, reflecting around 60% utilisation. Global practices generally consider around 70% utilisation as efficient, as this balances flexibility and congestion control.

Rising competition among the ports on the eastern and western coastlines, particularly with the rapid expansion of private ports, has led to overlapping infrastructure development and dispersed cargo movement. Future port development should be guided by realistic demand forecasting, integrated logistics planning, and continuous market assessment.

(The writer is a retired associate professor of the Indian Maritime University-Chennai Campus. Views are personal)

Popcorns, premium seats and hit flicks

H1 2026 marks the highest post-pandemic cinema revenue driven by advance sales, surging demand for luxury formats and all genres clicking; India box office collections grew by 20% in the January-June period at ₹6,665 cr. over ₹5,570 cr. in the same period last year, outpacing global markets

NEWS ANALYSIS

Meenakshi Verma Ambwani

From luxury seating to packed single screens, India’s box office is witnessing a historic, post-pandemic surge. Christopher Nolan’s *The Odyssey*, which crossed ₹100 crore in gross collections within the first week of its release, is just the latest blockbuster riding the wave. What’s remarkable is that it has been a broad-based growth across Hindi, regional and Bollywood in the first half of the year which saw the cinema industry record its highest gross collections post Covid. With a strong line up in the second half, this promises to be a milestone year for the movie industry with projections by Ormax Media that it will cross the ₹15,000-crore mark.

According to PVR INOX’s investor presentation, the India box office collections grew by 20% in the January-June period at ₹6,665 crore over ₹5,570 crore in the same period last year, outpacing international markets.

What enthuses Sanjeev Kumar Bijli, Executive Director, PVR INOX Ltd., is that the growth is not just in metros but tier-2 and tier-3 markets. “The encouraging trend is that consumers are not only just coming to watch the big budget films but also



Big ticket: Movies such as *Jan Nayagan* have seen stellar advance bookings. ANI

mid-scale and small films that are not star-driven,” he says.

Box-office boom

Notes Mr. Bijli, “Films that are now touching the ₹100-crore mark were even two years ago stopping at ₹30-40 crore. *Main Waapas Aaunga* has grossed nearly ₹100 crore. A horror English film like *Obsession* also garnered ₹100 crore. These are all sleeper hits and such smaller movies earning nearly ₹100 crore is a very positive sign.” He describes how star-driven films like *Bhoot Bangla* are garnering over ₹200 crore in gross collections. At the same time regional cinema is witnessing multi-fold growth.

Earlier, this month, Multiplex Association of India too pointed out that a healthy mix of blockbuster franchises, original stories,



Films that are now touching the ₹100-crore mark were even two years ago stopping at ₹30-40 crore

SANJEEV KUMAR BIJLI, Executive Director, PVR INOX

regional cinema, and international releases has all resonated with audiences across India leading to a strong first half (H1) in the year.

According to Ormax Media’s estimates, Dhurandhar :The Revenue, Border 2 and Telugu flick *Peddi* were among the top three grossers in the January-June period. Six films crossed the ₹200 crore mark in H1 of 2026, compared with four in the same period last year, said the media consulting firm.

Also, Project Hail Mary and the *Obsession* featured among the top 15 grossers indicating a strong run by Hollywood flicks, also evident in the hype surrounding *Odyssey* and *Spider-Man : Brand New Day*.

Audience advocacy

Devang Sampat, MD, Cinepolis India said that so far in the post Covid years, only the second half of the year have done well, but this year we have also seen a robust first half of the year. “Given a good content pipeline for the second half of the year, we could see this year’s box office collection outperforming historical benchmarks,” he said, adding, “For us the internal metrics that we closely monitor is the number of consumers visiting the cinema. We are seeing growth in footfalls and the

million plus footfall movies have been growing year-on-year.”

Echoing a similar view, Ashish Saksena, COO – Cinemas, BookMyShow said the biggest takeaway from H1 2026 has been that India’s theatrical success is no longer being driven by one language or one genre. “We’ve also seen greater stability in box office trends compared to the immediate post-pandemic years. Rather than relying on one or two tentpole releases, we’re seeing a wider mix of films sustaining theatrical momentum through audience advocacy and positive word-of-mouth,” he added.

Movies like *Dhurandhar: The Revenge*, *Jan Nayagan* and the *Odyssey* have also seen stellar advance bookings.

“Consumers are increasingly booking tickets earlier, driven by anticipation around upcoming releases rather than waiting for reviews or word of mouth, which reflects growing confidence in today’s theatrical slate. We’re also seeing films sustain their theatrical run for longer through strong audience advocacy. Main *Vaapas Aaunga*, for instance, continued to perform steadily in cinemas several weeks after release, despite audiences knowing it would eventually arrive on OTT. Another encouraging indicator has been the gradual pickup in weekend business across a wider range of films,” Mr. Saksena added.

Leading multiplex chains are also focusing strongly on expanding their screen counts. “What is important is to increase the screen density in the country and there is a lot of headroom for growth. We are looking at adding 40 screens per year focusing on expanding across the key catchments irrespective of whether it is tier-1, tier-2 or metro,” said Mr. Sampat.

Premiumisation

Consumers are also increasingly becoming value-conscious rather than price-conscious driving the premiumisation trend in the film industry.

“The *Odyssey* is a great example of this shift. Many audiences have chosen to wait specifically to experience the film in IMAX rather than watch it in a standard format, underlining how premium formats have become a key driver of theatrical demand,” says Saksena describing how this trend is driving investments across the exhibition ecosystem, with cinemas continuously upgrading sound, projection and overall in-cinema experiences, while filmmakers are increasingly designing films that are best experienced on the big screen.

“Almost 20% of our circuit is premium screens like IMAX, 4DX, ICE, and ScreenX, Insignia and Director’s Cut Luxe,” says Mr. Bijli.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Drawing parallels between A.P., TN airport projects

T E Raja Simhan

With the greenfield Bhogapuram airport, near Visakhapatnam, set to be inaugurated on August 1 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, comparisons have once again surfaced between Andhra Pradesh’s (AP) flagship aviation project and the proposed Parandur airport near Chennai.

While both airports in southern India were conceived to meet the rising demand, their timelines have diverged sharply because of the nature of the land identified for acquisition and the challenges that followed. Bhogapuram, which has secured its aerodrome licence and is ready for commercial operations, had received its site clearance from the

Centre in 2016. The AP government awarded the concession to GMR Airports in 2020, the foundation stone was laid in May 2023, and the construction was completed in about three years.

Parandur, in contrast, remains in the pre-construction stage despite the then Tamil Nadu government deciding on the site in 2022 and receiving the Centre’s in-principle approval in 2023. The State is yet to complete the land acquisition.

The new government, headed by Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, is going slow as its leader and TN Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay had supported the villagers of Parandur in opposing the greenfield project. This was also a stepping stone for his entry into politics.



At Parandur, at stake are nearly 5,000 acres of fertile irrigated farmland and wetlands.

The Bhogapuram site largely comprises dry agricultural land, government land and scrubland with fewer habitations, making land acquisition primarily an exercise in compensation and rehabilitation.

At Parandur, on the other hand, at stake are nearly 5,000 acres of fertile irrigated farmland, wetlands, and irrigation tanks spread

across 13 villages. The project has faced sustained opposition from local residents over the looming loss of multi-crop agricultural land, the disruption of irrigation systems and the ecological role of the interconnected wetlands that serve as flood buffers. The complexity inherent in acquiring environmentally sensitive and densely cultivated land has slowed the project.

Location challenges

Officials familiar with both projects emphasised that it was like “comparing apples and oranges”, given the vastly different land acquisition challenges. However, they acknowledged that the two projects continue to be viewed as benchmarks for infrastructure execution in southern

India.

J. Krishnan, partner at S Natesa Iyer Logistics LLP, said Andhra Pradesh’s approach to site selection helped avoid controversies right from the early stage.

“The Andhra Pradesh government’s initial search and identification of the airport land was methodical and the search committee eschewed any controversy likely to surface by interested groups. This ensured the project did not face major implementation delays,” he said.

Parandur has attracted environmental and livelihood concerns from day one, he pointed out. “The dense industrial and urban activity around Chennai has made identifying a new airport site particularly challenging. Differences are bound to surface even

if alternative locations are identified,” he added.

Economic implications

Industry stakeholders also stressed the economic implications of the delay. Sharmindar Saravanan, MD of SSK Smart Move Logistics Pvt. Ltd., said Chennai’s air cargo ecosystem is facing congestion, infrastructure limitations and lengthy processing times, prompting some exporters and freight forwarders to consider routing cargo through Bengaluru, Hyderabad or Kochi.

“If exporters continue shifting cargo to neighbouring states, Tamil Nadu risks losing business despite having one of India’s largest manufacturing bases,” he said.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Urban India’s booming weekend economy, a huge opportunity

Harish Bhat

On a recent Saturday evening, I was at Church Street in central Bangalore. It was virtually impossible to walk on this road, because it was jam-packed with thousands of shoppers and revellers. There were long queues to get into restaurants. The nearby metro station was teeming with people. It looked like a festival day, though it was just another weekend.

Then on Sunday afternoon I attended a talk on quantum physics by a friend. It was held at a pub in Koramangala, with entry priced above ₹1,000 per person, inclusive of snacks. I was surprised to see a full house – more than 120 people – all totally engaged, with intellect

and food. The talk was fabulous; equally amazing was the large number of participants. Once again, just another weekend in Bangalore.

A day later, the penny dropped in my mind when I read an excellent report titled ‘The many urban Indias’, published by PRICE and Tata Sons, and authored by Rajesh Shukla, Roopa Purushothaman and Vishal Vaibhaw. One of the key insights put forward was the emergence of the ‘weekend economy’ in urban India.

The report highlighted how, on average, urban consumers in India spend ₹6,724 during weekdays and ₹10,732 each weekend. This implies that 61.5% of weekly spending is concentrated on just Saturday



Weekend buzz: Retail stores can remain open longer on weekends, and cities can facilitate this. K MURALI KUMAR

and Sunday.

A wide variety of categories benefit from this shift. Spending on discretionary products – such as fashion and apparel, entertainment and electronics – virtually doubles during weekends, compared to

weekdays. Spending on essential items – such as groceries and healthcare – also moves higher during weekends, though more moderately.

This weekend splurge is seen across the top 100 cities of India, not just the

metros. What has driven this big shift to the urban weekend economy? My hypothesis is that there are three key reasons for this.

First, with dual-income households now becoming far more common in Indian cities, families have little or no time to spend money meaningfully on weekdays, because of long hours at work and travel. Similarly, children are tied up on weekdays with school, tuitions and an increasing number of other activities. They are unable to engage in any other meaningful out-of-home activities on these days. This leaves only weekends for shopping, family outings or other leisure experiences.

Second, there is a distinct mindset change when

people enter weekends – we want to let our hair down, relax and spend on experiences that recharge our physical and emotional batteries. This contrasts with the hectic, stressful weekdays, where productivity is the key goal. In short, the weekday urbanite and the weekend urbanite are psychographically different from each other. Third, in today’s digital-fuelled world, people are constantly seeking hits of adrenaline. On weekdays, they get these hits from work, interactions with their colleagues, and all the noise and buzz of office. Come weekend, they need to escape to nearby resorts, or eat fancy meals, or indulge in shopping therapy to obtain their shots of pleasure. Cooling their

heels at home is no longer an acceptable option.

Riding the wave

So, what can marketers and cities do to ride this weekend wave? Here are some thoughts.

Retail stores can remain open longer on weekends, and cities can facilitate this. This happens in many cases, but just recently I saw a store turn away a customer who came in at around 9 pm on Sunday evening. Retail stores can also design special experiences for customers over the weekends – such as nail art or *mehendi* or Mediterranean cooking classes – which can prove very engaging. Product brands can also consider customised weekend engagement programmes.

Cities can demarcate weekend zones, with permissions for activities such as busking, food vending, street theatre, book readings, and art displays. Public services such as public transport, sanitation, road lighting and safety can be stepped up to ensure people have access to reliable, cost-effective travel and feel safe while commuting or walking on roads, particularly during late hours.

With imagination, city planners and marketers can transform each of the 52 weekends during the year into win-win festivals that engage people beautifully and also generate significant incremental economic activity.

(Harish Bhat is a curious marketer and bestselling author)

Chief suspect in Berlin Pride attack killed in confrontation with police



Cuban leader accuses Washington of seeking to 'appropriate' island



New U.K. PM vows to put 'Britain's interest first' in ties with Trump

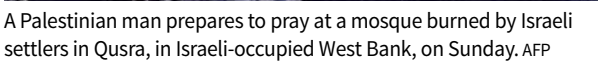


Trump is giving Iran talks 'some space'; no munition issue: Waltz



Iran slams Ukrainian attack on its vessel in Caspian Sea

Palestinian local author-



According to Iranian state television, the Foreign Ministry summoned the Ukrainian charge d'affaires in Tehran on Saturday to protest this "hostile and criminal act".

In June, Oman and Iran said they would discuss imposing service fees, a move Washington opposes. But Muscat also said ships could transit Hormuz via its waters, angering Tehran, which responded with a pattern of escalation.



Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece, has been added to the World Heritage List on Sunday by the UN. AFP

UN adds Olympus, D-Day beaches to World Heritage sites

Associated Press
SEOUL

World War II's D-Day landing beaches in northern France and the iconic Mount Olympus in Greece were among the sites added to the World Heritage List on Sunday at a UN committee meeting in South Korea reviewing dozens of nominations.

The UNESCO committee, which meets in Busan through Wednesday, also inscribed the ancient Japanese capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara and South Sudan's Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape, host to one of the world's largest land mammal migrations and the country's first addition to the World Heritage List.

The French designation covers the five Normandy landing beaches – Omaha, Utah, Sword, Gold and Juno – where more than 1,50,000 Allied troops came ashore on June 6, 1944, along with the Pointe du Hoc assault site, all central to the campaign to liberate Western Europe from Nazi occupation during World War II.

International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), which evaluates submissions to the heritage committee, said the sites contain extensive remnants, from German fortifications and bomb-scarred landscapes to Allied harbour structures and sunken vessels, marking an “event widely perceived as having enabled the return of freedom and heralded a lasting peace on the European continent.”

ICOMOS also called for stronger monitoring and preservation efforts on the sites, citing potential threats posed by tourism, climate change and rising sea levels, and the development of wind farms near the areas.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Associated Press
NEW YORK

The Trump administration has imposed double-digit tariffs on more than 60 countries, using a legal justification that permits the President to levy import taxes and other sanctions against countries found to engage in “unjustifiable,” “unreasonable” or “discriminatory” trade practices. The new tariffs announced in recent days take effect just as temporary 10% worldwide tariffs expired, and critics say they are less about cracking down on forced labour than they are a way to replace those tariffs.

The expired tariffs were themselves a temporary replacement for worldwide tariffs the Supreme Court struck down in February.

The tariffs were levied on countries that the U.S. says either don't have or don't effectively enforce a forced-labour import ban. The affected countries, which account for 99% of U.S. imports, were quick to protest, calling the Trump administration's claims unfounded and arbitrary, as nations with vastly different records on forced labour received the same tariff level. The U.S. spent

four months investigating but gave few details on how it arrived at the tariff rates, which are either 10% or 12.5%.

The tariffs were levied under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 on countries that the U.S. determined had failed “to impose and effectively enforce a prohibition on the importation of goods produced with forced labour.” During President Donald Trump's first term, he cited Section 301 to impose sweeping tariffs on Chinese imports amid a dispute over the sharp-elbowed tactics Beijing was using to challenge America's technological dominance. The U.S. is also using 301 powers to counter what it calls unfair Chinese practices in the shipbuilding industry.

‘Trying side doors’

“The Section 301 allow a permanent tariff without going to Congress to settle the dispute,” said Barry Appleton, a law professor and co-director of New York Law School's Center for International Law. “That's what all of this is about. The President doesn't want to knock on the front door of Congress, so he's trying every side door and every unlatched window to get in.”

The office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) said it consult-



The U.S. slapped new tariffs on over 60 countries that it says do not enforce a forced-labour import ban. REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

ed with all 60 economies under investigation and held two rounds of public hearings, elicited more than 2,100 public comments, and had “engagement” with its trading partners about what they were doing to combat forced labour bans.

“There's not a lot of hard evidence there,” said Scott Lincicome, vice president for general economics and trade policy at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. “It's pretty laughable on its face to think that a country like the ones in Europe or in Norway or Switzerland aren't doing enough to police forced labour.”

And even if countries do enact and enforce the forced-labour import bans the U.S. wants, they would still need to prove that they're enforcing them to

Washington's satisfaction before the tariffs would be removed, said lawyer Patrick Childress, a partner at Holland & Knight and a former U.S. trade official.

Many countries have pushed back against the Trump administration's findings. Brazil, which faces a 12.5% forced-labour tariff, called the U.S. move “arbitrary and unjustified.” The U.S. “chose to manipulate an issue of great importance to human rights and the struggles of workers worldwide in order to accuse 59 countries and the European Union of unfair practices,” it said in a statement. Australia also questioned the justification for its 12.5% tariff.

Carve-outs have riled some industries. The National Council of Textile Organizations (NCTO), which describes itself as the voice

of the American textile industry, protested a mechanism that exempts the Section 301 tariffs for textile and apparel imports from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Malaysia based on those countries' imports of U.S. cotton and textiles.

“No other industry has been more disadvantaged by forced labour than the U.S. textile industry, which employs 4,53,000 workers and has lost 41 plants over the past two plus years,” NCTO chief executive Kim Glas said in a statement. “We remain strongly concerned that USTR's textile mechanism will harm the very domestic manufacturers the administration seeks to help.”

The U.S. has two major pieces of legislation related to forced-labour import bans. The Tariff Act of 1930 gave Customs and Border Protection the authority to seize shipments where forced labour was suspected and to block further imports. But it had a big carve-out: If there was “consumptive demand,” meaning there wasn't sufficient supply to meet domestic demand, imports were allowed regardless of how they were produced. The Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act that took effect in 2016 eliminated that loophole.

In 2021, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention

Act was passed. It blocks imports from China's Xinjiang region unless businesses can prove the items were made without forced labour. But goods made with forced labour can still make it into the U.S. In 2015, an AP investigation found that slave labour was used in the fishing industry in Southeast Asia. The seafood they caught made its way to supermarkets and pet food providers across the U.S.

An investigation by AP in 2020 into the \$65 billion palm oil industry found labour abuses among an invisible workforce consisting of millions of men, women and children in Asia. The fruit they harvested made its way into the supply chains of major companies, including Unilever, L'Oreal, Nestle and Procter & Gamble.

During hearings on the tariffs this month, National Retail Federation vice president Jonathan Gold, who was representing the business coalition the Joint Association Forced Labor Working Group at the hearing, said that in order for the import bans to work, they would have to be much more extensive.

He said there need to be “clear, measurable benchmarks” tied to tariffs for countries to hit, and that the U.S. should help countries build enforcement programmes.

Amid West Asia war, residents cash in on Dubai real estate cool-down

Agence France-Presse
DUBAI

Just over a year after moving to Dubai, Steve found himself moving unexpectedly up the property ladder, taking advantage of a cooling real estate market amid the West Asia war.

His new apartment is larger and closer to work than his previous residence, but the rent is nonetheless 15% cheaper, he said, using a pseudonym due to Dubai's sensitivity on the matter. When he arrived in 2025, “it was really difficult to get a place in this area and the rents had gone up by a lot”, said the 35-year-old, who works in the media sector.

Dubai's property market – a pillar of its econo-



War woes: Dubai is yet to recover from the blow dealt by the war in West Asia, which dented the Emirate's image as a safe city. REUTERS

my – has soared in recent years, buoyed by the arrival of international high-net-worth individuals attracted by the glamorous lifestyle on offer in the Emirate.

But the outbreak of the West Asia war in late February has dampened growth. Targets in Dubai came under fire in the ear-

ly days of Iran's retaliation against U.S. allies in the region. Even some of its most iconic sites, such as Burj Al Arab and the Palm Jumeirah, were not spared, dealing a blow to the city whose population is more than 90% foreigners.

Hostilities resumed in July, following an April cea-

sfire, but Dubai has so far not been in the firing line.

But, its image as a city that is “safe no matter what” has yet to recover from the blow it was dealt, said a real estate agent, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Clients have not completely disappeared, the agent said, but margins for negotiation have expanded. “Since the war, the market's shifted from a seller's market to a buyer's market,” she said.

British real estate consultancy Knight Frank said “we have already noted prices ebbing widely across the city by between five and 20%, depending on location”, after having surged by an average of 82.9% since 2021.

Left with little



Children queue to receive meals from a charity kitchen at the Maghazi camp for Palestinian refugees in the central Gaza Strip on Sunday. AFP

South Africa's migrant exodus sparks labour shortages across farms, factories

Agence France-Presse
DURBAN

Zimbabwean farm-worker Aaron Majatamhe was heading home at sunset after a shift in one of South Africa's top fruit-producing regions, where bushes laden with bright unpicked citrus stood in rows.

“I see a lot of farm-owners who are crying now... people have to harvest those *naartjies* but there is no one,” the 33-year-old told AFP.

The same shortage, he said, is looming in the vineyards. “It's time to cut off the grapes and there is no one.”

Similar scenes are playing out across South Africa as factories, farms and even ordinary households scramble for labour after thousands of foreign workers left in a matter of weeks

to escape deadly anti-migrant protests and intensified immigration enforcement.

Fringe anti-foreigner groups had set June 30 as an unofficial deadline for undocumented migrants to go home, triggering the exodus of more than 1,60,000 people, according to an AFP tally based on figures from African governments repatriating their citizens.

Zimbabwe, which accounted for the largest share of those returning, said many had worked in South Africa's farming, domestic work and construction sectors.

The first cracks were felt almost immediately in KwaZulu-Natal's sugar belt.

One farmer on the north coast said he lost up to 80% of his cane-cutting workforce virtually overnight.

“Production and supply have deteriorated to the point where it is going to be difficult for the mills to stay open,” he said, speaking anonymously because he feared retaliation.

‘Back-breaking’ work

Another grower near Mid-Illovo, a region of rolling hills south of Durban, said most cane cutters in his area came from Lesotho, the tiny kingdom encircled by South Africa.

“There are fields we are supposed to be cutting, but there are just not enough people. Local people don't like this job because it is back-breaking and physical,” he said.

That argument is fiercely disputed.

With unemployment above 33% – and far higher when discouraged job seekers are included – la-



Hundreds of Zimbabweans await transport home after fleeing anti-migrant violence in South Africa, at a camp in Beitbridge. AFP

bour unions and researchers argue there is no shortage of South Africans willing to work.

Instead, they say, many employers favour migrant workers because they are cheaper, more flexible and less likely to demand formal contracts, benefits or legal protections.

“They are making a profit out of foreign nations,” said Patrick Williams, a lo-

cal organiser with the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union.

Foreign farmworkers, he said, routinely worked seven days a week, skipped lunch breaks to maximise piece-rate earnings and were often paid below the national minimum wage.

For employers, the challenge is not only finding workers, but replacing

years of experience.

In Durban's Chatsworth industrial area, a manager at a clothing factory said the departure of skilled machinists from Malawi and Mozambique had left factories struggling to meet orders.

“We can barely meet our targets because most were forced to go,” she said on condition of anonymity, adding it would take time for local workers to master the job.

The government has sought to respond to public anger over migration by promoting a “locals first” approach, while acknowledging that some industries rely on foreign skills and labour.

This week it expanded its Trusted Employer Scheme that fast-tracks worker visas for companies that meet require-

ments including predominantly employing South Africans, investing in skills development and operating in priority sectors.

Industry groups are urging the government to create legal pathways for seasonal foreign labour, arguing that sectors such as agriculture have become dependent on migrant workers and cannot replace them overnight.

South Africa should consider a regulated seasonal worker programme similar to one in the United States, said Siyabonga Madlala, chief executive of the South African Farmers Development Association.

“There may be a need for a special dispensation allowing seasonal labour from SADC countries where local supply is insufficient,” he told Newsroom Afrika, referring to the 16-

member Southern African Development Community bloc.

More than 60% of South Africa's immigrants are estimated to come from SADC. Yet for many who left, the debate over labour policy has been eclipsed by fears for their safety after at least four foreigners were killed, according to police data.

Wayne Chimbadzwa Mutasa, a Zimbabwean national who had lived in Robertson since 2014, said he left after foreign workers were targeted in door-to-door raids. “The people who came into the houses of Zimbabweans were police officers saying that you are living here illegally,” he told AFP as he prepared for repatriation. His fellow national Majatamhe, the farm worker, has decided to remain for now.

Gymnast Langton discharged from hospital after a nasty fall



'The young bunch of players have been showing tremendous energy'



Pogacar bags a record-equalling fifth Tour de France title



Hodge, Hope help West Indies post 311 in the first innings



Mirabai completes a hat-trick of gold as records tumble

Neeraj delighted to be back at CWG where it all began

Sooryavanshi sparkles in India's clean sweep against Zimbabwe

U Mumba's UTT reign continues

CM
YK

P.K. Ajith Kumar

Sophie Devine stopped kindly for her fans. She smiled into the selfie camera. She engaged for a while with the cricket fans, who had assembled in large numbers on that warm Sunday afternoon at Lord's for the Women's T20 World Cup match between India and Australia.

Devine's World Cup had been over by then: New Zealand had been knocked out of the Women's T20 World Cup.

She had announced that she would be quitting international cricket after the World Cup. Suzie Bates and Lea Tahuu, who along with Devine were the members of the New Zealand that won the last T20 World Cup in UAE two years ago, had also played their last matches for White Ferns.

It was as if these magnificent women, who between them played 894 games for New Zealand, were making the opening statement for what would be a summer of farewells in cricket. Their countryman Kane Williamson ended his international career during the Test series in England, which overlapped with the Women's World Cup. And there were more to follow: Ben Stokes, Heather Knight, Tammy Beaumont.

Rarely has cricket seen so many stars leaving the stage within a space of so little time. We also saw the curtain coming down on two high-profile coaching stints: of Brendon McCullum and Stephen Fleming. As if all that wasn't enough, Garry Sobers, cricket's greatest all-rounder of all time, bid an even more poignant farewell.

Devine, a quality all-rounder, has been one of the most feared batters in women's cricket. Those who watched her make 99 off just 36 balls for Royal Challengers Bengaluru against Gujarat Titans at the Brabourne Stadium in the inaugural Women's Premier League in 2023 were fortunate. It was the McCullum moment of the WPL. And McCullum, whose stunning hundred for Kolkata Knight Riders against RCB in the first ever match of the IPL set the tone for the world's most glamorous cricket league, had been the biggest influence on her, she had told this correspondent in an interview.

Sense of humour, and purpose

International women's cricket will certainly miss those big hits from Devine. Her sense of humour will be missed as much. Her interviews and press conferences have been fun.

After her sensational innings against KKR, when Devine was asked about her going after Australian all-rounder Ashleigh Gardner (24 runs in the second over of the innings), she smiled: "She has been a bully to a lot of other people over the years and I think it is only fair that she has got a bit of her own back."

Like Gardner, many bowlers have been at the receiving end of the might of Devine's bat over the last decade and a half, during which she scored 8096 runs and 241 wickets for New Zealand.

In 2020, she became the first player - man or woman - to hit six fifty-plus scores in T20Is. She had also represented New Zealand in hockey.

Bates had made her debut for New Zealand seven months before Devine. She too was a double international, having played basketball for her country. She, in fact, represented New Zealand at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

Bates has finished her international career with 4758 runs in T20Is, more than any other batter, male or female. She also scored 5982 runs in ODIs, with 13 hundreds. But it hadn't been easy for her, like other players of her generation, when women's cricket wasn't anywhere near as popular as it is today.

"When I was young, from 18 to 24, I studied, and we got grants from the government to study and play sports to help pay for our living allowance," Bates had once said in an interview to *The Hindu*. "I took part-time roles like coaching, whether it was basketball, cricket, to earn a little bit of money on the side, and when we were away, we got reimbursed."

If things are much easier for the women cricketers of today, they owe it to players like Bates, Devine and Tahuu, the seamer who finished her international career with 225 wickets for New Zealand.

Remarkable transformation

Knight and Beaumont, too, have been fortunate that they could be part of the remarkable transformation the game has undergone since they debuted for England. Women's cricket has changed so much that Knight could see her own image staring at her from all over London - at tube and bus stations and at Lord's - this English summer, thanks to the MCC's catchy campaign to promote the historic England-India Women's Test.

She and Beaumont were indeed lucky that they could end their international careers with the first ever Test match for women at Lord's. That was the 15th Test for Knight, who played 160 ODIs and 145 T20Is. She had led England to the 2017 World Cup victory at home. She was a

Cricket's summer of goodbyes

Rarely has the sport seen so many stars leaving the stage within a space of so little time. We also saw the curtain coming down on two high-profile coaching stints: of Brendon McCullum and Stephen Fleming. As if all that wasn't enough, Garry Sobers, cricket's greatest all-rounder of all-time, bid an even more poignant farewell



Signing off: Devine, Tahuu, Bates, McCullum, Stokes, Williamson, Fleming, Beaumont and Knight. GETTY IMAGES & K. MURALI KUMAR

batter that England could bank on.

Runs flowed freely from Beaumont's bat too, during her 17-year career, in which she scored 12 hundreds and 24 fifties in ODIs. She also became the first ever woman to score a Test double hundred.

If England's women's team lost two of their best batters, the men's team had to say goodbye to its inspiring captain, all-rounder extraordinaire and miracle-worker. Stokes is easily one of the most gifted cricketers of his generation and will go down in history as one of the game's all-time greats. With two incredible innings in 2019, he won England a World Cup and an Ashes Test victory for ages.

He was also the ideal captain to implement McCullum's brave ideas to transform England's Test fortunes. While the verdict on Bazball may not be unanimous, the fact remains that Stokes and McCullum brought a new dimension to Test match cricket.

The complete package

Stokes will be remembered as one of the most complete cricketers: he was brilliant as a batter, bowler and fielder. Yes, his career was hampered by injuries and a few incidents outside the field that he may not like to remember. But, few cricketers in our time have given the game as many exciting moments on the field. Williamson has undoubtedly been one of the greatest batters of his generation, a part of the Fab Four alongside Joe Root, Steve Smith and Virat Kohli. He was fabulous across formats. He finished his international career with 9515 runs in Tests at an average of 54.06, 7256

in ODIs at 48.69, 2575 in T20Is at 33.44. And he hit 48 international hundreds.

He also led New Zealand admirably. Fittingly, he was the captain when the Kiwis won the inaugural World Test Championship, after beating India in the final. He has been admired not just for being a run-machine, but for his genial nature as well.

It was from McCullum that Williamson had taken over the New Zealand captaincy. That was in 2016. Some three years later, McCullum turned to coaching with Trinbago Knight Riders and Kolkata Knight Riders.

Then in 2022, he was appointed as England's coach. That would prove to be perhaps the most discussed coaching job in cricket's history. McCullum's ultra-aggressive approach to playing Test cricket, called Bazball, gave England some great Test wins, but some chastening defeats too. Bazball had begun on a stunning note, with England notching up four magnificent against in a row at home - three against New Zealand and one against India. Some of the innings the England batters played, under McCullum, by the likes of Jonny Bairstow, Ollie Pope and Ben Duckett, were spectacular.

Sport's greatest theatre

But Test cricket is no extension of T20 cricket. It is sport's greatest theatre, and the most challenging mode of all sports. That is why we all love it.

You cannot Bazball your way out of trouble all the time. It was bound to fail at some points of time. And it failed spectacularly in the difficult conditions of India and Australia. Finally, McCullum had to go, after the defeat to New Zealand



Sir Gary! Sobers, the undisputed king of cricket. GETTY IMAGES

in the home series.

But, he had shown a new way to play Test cricket. That will not be forgotten.

The other high-profile Kiwi coach's departure too was perhaps as inevitable. Fleming's association had been, however, much longer, and he had become one of the faces of Chennai Super Kings. He became the CSK coach in 2009 and the following year, he led the franchise to the IPL title. He helped CSK triumph again in 2011, 2018, 2021 and 2023.

He was in Chennai all along, except in 2016 and 2017 when he moved to Rising Pune Supergiant following CSK's two-year suspension. Fleming's at CSK had one of the IPL's most successful coaching careers.

There was no IPL in Sobers' time. Even the ODIs arrived a bit too late for him (he played just one). He would have been T20 cricket's biggest superstar.

Cricket's most versatile player, who scored 8032 runs at an average of 57.78 and took 235 wickets from 93 Tests, passed away on July 17 at the age of 89.

THE GIST

▼ Williamson ended his international career during the Test series in England, which overlapped with the Women's World Cup

▼ McCullum, with Bazball, had shown a new way to play Test cricket. The other Kiwi coach's departure too was perhaps as inevitable. Fleming's association had been, however, much longer, and he had become one of the faces of Chennai Super Kings

▼ If things are much easier for the women cricketers of today, they owe it to players like Bates, Devine and Tahuu



TAMIL NADU



In the eye of the storm: A view of the land belonging to the Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple in Palani. It was illegally registered in the names of private individuals, and the registration was later cancelled. G. KARTHIKEYAN

Trouble over temple land

First, it was Thirupparankundram, and now, it is Palani; southern Tamil Nadu has been the bed of controversies surrounding religious places for a while now. The title and ownership of a parcel of land, said to be within the precincts of the Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple, are under debate, becoming the first such crisis the TVK government has had to handle. **B. Tilak Chandar** finds out all about the case, along with **L. Srikrishna** and **S. Sundar**

It is best to start at the beginning of any story. This one begins here: A patch of 1.40 acres of land located in Palani town in Dindigul district was originally owned by Kuppusamy Maniyakarar of Balasamuthiram. This is from the records of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Department.

He had donated the land through a gift deed to one Dhandapani Swamy in 1888 with the objective of establishing a math. Later, the math was developed by several persons and buildings were constructed for providing shelter to devotees visiting the Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple in the town. The proceeds of the land were willed for maintenance of the math and performance of puja and other services to the temple.

“No one was given the rights to sell the land or create encumbrance to it; hence, the land became the property of the trust. The land belonging to the trust could not be sold by any individual,” the then Joint Director and Executive Officer of the temple, S. Marimuthu, said in a letter addressed to the Joint Sub-Registrar of Palani days before the land was registered on July 7.

Interestingly, there have been multiple attempts to sell the land in the past. Dhandapani Ayya, a descendant of Dhandapani Swamy in whose name the land had been vested for developing the math, had sold the land to private individuals in 1999. Then, with the objective of safeguarding the land, the HR&CE Commissioner on June 17, 1999 appointed the Joint Commissioner (JC) and Executive Officer of the temple as the *Thakkar* or fitperson to administer the land.

Meanwhile, all legal efforts made by Dhandapani Ayya to remove the JC as the fitperson of the land in different courts, including the civil court, the Madras High Court, and the Supreme Court, failed. The High Court in 2002 observed that Dhandapani Ayya was not the owner and possessor of the trust property.

A subsequent inquiry conducted by the then JC of the HR&CE Department, Madurai, under the HR&CE Act, ruled that the math did not belong to any private persons but was a public property. This was confirmed by the HR&CE Commissioner in 2016. Against this backdrop, Mr. Marimuthu wrote a letter on July 2, 2026 to the Joint Sub-Registrar in the office of the District Sub-Registrar, Palani, revealing that attempts had been made in 2025 to register the land in the name of private individuals.

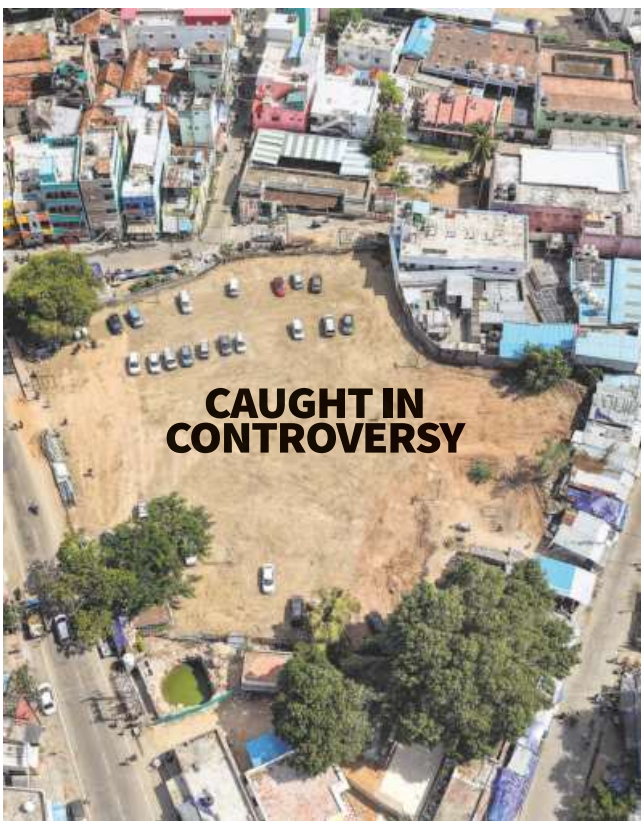
The flashpoint

On March 27, a sale deed was executed for ₹2 crore. After the issue moved from the police to the judiciary, the Tamil Nadu government ordered transfer of the case to the CB-CID. The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court has since cancelled the registration.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, senior officials of the HR&CE, Registration, Police, and Revenue Departments said the persons behind the “deal” seemed to have utilised the loopholes in the law.

...fraud had been played and fraud has to be nipped in the bud failing which further innocent persons would only be misguided by the sale deed

MADURAI BENCH OF THE MADRAS HIGH COURT



The fraudulent registration of 1.40 acres of land belonging to Arulmigu Dhandapani Swamigal Madam at the foothills of Palani raised eyebrows. This is how the land deal happened:

March 27, 2026: Deed of Sale entered into between the vendor and purchasers	Commercial Taxes and Registration D. Logesh Tamilselvan acknowledges that there was a mistake on the part of the Sub-Registrar (in-charge) in registering the land, and a departmental inquiry has been initiated against him
April 1: The Sub-Registrar refuses to register the sale deed	
April 10: Single Judge of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court allows the petition filed by the purchasers and directs the Sub-Registrar to register the sale deed subject to the document being otherwise in order	July 15: The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court allows an appeal filed by Arulmigu Dhandapani Swamigal Madam in Palani and declares as null and void the controversial sale deed executed in favour of certain individuals with regard to 1.40 acres of land
July 2: The Joint Commissioner, HR and CE, Palani, writes to the District Registrar asking that the land not be registered	July 15: The probe transferred to the CB-CID from the Palani Adivaram police
July 6: The document is registered by the Sub-Registrar (in-charge)	July 16: The CB-CID begins probe
July 13: The Palani Adivaram police register a case	July 19: Former Minister for Commercial Taxes and Registration P. Moorthy questions how the transaction had been registered when the Registration Department had special markings for HR and CE temple lands that prohibited such transactions
July 13: Sub-Registrar (in-charge) Justin Manikandan Subramanian placed under suspension	
July 14: Minister for	

For instance, the registration (according to the sale deed, a copy of which is with *The Hindu*) had been planned when the Model Code of Conduct for the 2026 Assembly election was in force. The election dates were announced on March 15 and the deed was executed on March 27, when all the political parties and officials were directly or indirectly busy with the election process. Hence, the needle of suspicion pointed to a few high ranking officials too.

Officials studying documents pertaining to the “deal” said the seller, M.D. Murugadass, son of Dhandapani Ayya of the Thirupugal Swamigal Murugadas Swamigal alias Dhandapani Swamigal Trust, had stated in the sale deed that he was authorised to sell the property in order to reinvest the proceeds for generating income to fulfil charitable objectives. He further said that through a public notice and bidding process, the purchasers – K. Vellaidurai of Tiruppur and D. Sethupathy of Dindigul – were chosen as the highest bidders. The seller had stated in the sale deed that the purchasers were informed about the cases pending in OS No. 358/2018 and OS No. 545/2016. Thereafter, they agreed to remit ₹2 crore, he added.

The current case

According to the document, it is said the property originally belonged to Thirupugal Swamigal Murugadas Swamigal alias Dhandapani Swamigal, who had created a private trust named Dhandapani Swami Madam for carrying out charitable activities from the income from the trust properties. The land forms part of the properties dedicated to the trust.

Further, the document said that after the demise of the earlier trustees, the trusteeship devolved upon successive trustees, including the father of the present vendor, Dhandapani Ayya, who administered the trust properties. The present vendor, being the lawful trustee, had been managing and administering the properties. As the property was not yielding sufficient income for carrying out the objectives of the trust, a resolution was passed on March 18, 2026 authorising its sale to reinvest the proceeds for generating income to fulfil the charitable objectives.

The vendor agreed to sell and the purchaser agreed to buy the scheduled property for ₹2 crore. The purchasers moved the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court in April this year after the authorities refused to register the document. They presented a sale deed executed in their favour on March 27 for registration. However, the Sub-Registrar refused to register the sale deed.

The petitioners contended that the Sub-Registrar had no authority to adjudicate upon the question of title and mere pendency of civil suits could not be a ground for refusal of registration unless there was an order of restraint operating against them. A Single Judge Bench allowed the petition and directed the Sub-Registrar to register the sale deed, dated March 27, 2026, subject to

the document being otherwise in order.

In July 2026, the Arulmigu Dhandapani Swamigal Madam, represented by its *Thakkar*, preferred an appeal against this order. The appellant was not made a party to the writ petition before the Single Judge Bench. The court was informed that on the particular day when the regular officer was absent, the official in charge had registered the document. In response, the court said, “We are compelled to pass this order since fraud had been played and fraud has to be nipped in the bud failing which further innocent persons would only be misguided by the sale deed which had been registered by the registering authority”.

Further, the court said, “We are informed that the writ petitioners, while presenting the sale deed, had not even paid the requisite stamp duty and the sale deeds are therefore kept pending for want of sufficient stamp duty. This makes the situation all the more worse... They were however able to convince the Sub-Registrar to still register the document”.

The court declared the document void. “We take this extraordinary step to issue such a declaration in view of the fraud, which is evident at every stage of the process involved... The writ petitioners will have to suffer owing to their acts of fraud. Since we have declared the document void, we would refrain from imposing costs as we do not want the tainted money to flow further and cause further pollution,” it further said.

The accused in the case – the suspended Sub-Registrar (in-charge), Justin Manikandan Subramanian, and Vellaidurai – moved the High Court seeking anticipatory bail. According to Justin Manikandan, the document was originally presented for registration before the then Sub-Registrar, S. Balasundhar, on April 1. Meanwhile, District Registrar Sasikala was also placed under suspension.

The entire process of presentation of the document, admission of execution, obtaining signatures, and completion of all other statutory formalities had already been completed by the then Sub-Registrar on July 3. Justin Manikandan merely assigned the document number and forwarded the document to the Collector (Stamps), it was submitted.

However, the State said that though the document had been presented on July 3 and almost all the registration formalities had been completed by the then Sub-Registrar, the document had not been finally registered. It was Justin Manikandan who was in charge and completed the registration by assigning the registration number.

Given that the substantial part of the registration process had already been completed by the then Sub-Registrar and in order to balance the interests of the investigation and the liberty of the petitioner, the court granted interim protection to Justin Manikandan, conditionally, till August 4. But it dismissed the anticipatory bail petition filed by Vellaidurai.

The guideline value of the property is nearly ₹16 crore, whereas the vendor has hurriedly sold the property for ₹2 crore. This also raises serious doubts about the *bona fide* nature of the document. Allegations against the officers involved in the document registration and the trustees accused of having been paid ₹1 lakh in total for passing a resolution to sell the property should be investigated, the court said.

Under these circumstances, Palani Municipal Chairperson P. Uma Maheswari Pradheep filed a petition before the Madurai Bench seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe. The Registration Department has formed a committee to conduct an inquiry. The HR&CE Department has also constituted a committee to inspect the properties of the Palani temple and submit a report. CB-CID officers are conducting an investigation under the supervision of CB-CID Zonal Superintendent of Police Shajitha.

Temple property?

HR&CE Department officials said the property belonged to the temple and the administration had evicted encroachments following a court directive. However, the seller (Murugadass) claimed that he was the trustee of the property and had submitted evidence dating back to more than a century, the officials added.

Sources in the Registration Department said Justin Manikandan had given the approval for registration only after the High Court delivered its order. Some of the questions being raised are: If the land did not belong to the temple as claimed by the seller, why did the Madurai Bench cancel the registration and nullify the same? Secondly, if the land belonged to the Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple, how did Sub-Registrar Justin Manikandan allow the *per se* illegal, high-value registration to happen in a day?

On July 14, Minister for Commercial Taxes and Registration D. Logesh Tamilselvan acknowledged that there was a mistake on the part of the Sub-Registrar (in-charge) in registering the land. Former DMK Minister P. Moorthy said the law is clear that temple or Waqf properties cannot be registered. How then did the registration take place, he asked.

‘Bigger conspiracy’

Hindu Munnani State leader Kadeswara Subramanian has demanded a CBI probe and described it as a mega land scam worth ₹100 crore. He said the Hindu Munnani would observe a fast at Palani on Sunday.

After the temple Superintendent (Land Section), S. Muruganantham, filed a complaint, the Palani Adivaram police registered a case on July 13. The complaint mentions that the value of the land is around ₹100 crore. Vishwa Hindu Parishad functionary D. Senthilkumar wondered how the land was registered for a mere ₹2 crore. “The officials had deliberately allowed the exchequer to suffer a huge revenue loss by way of stamp duty [assuming that the land belonged to private persons]. This raises the suspicion that this deal could not have happened without pressure from some highly influential person or persons,” he added.

UTTAR PRADESH



Students protesting in front of of Mohammad Ali Jauhar University's gate in Rampur. ANUJ KUMAR

Bulldozers versus books

A demolition notice against 38 buildings of Mohammad Ali Jauhar University has triggered student protests, with the university alleging political targeting and the administration insisting on enforcing planning laws. **Anuj Kumar** explores the debate around Azam Khan's legacy, the future of minority education in Rampur, and the political stakes ahead of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election

Outside the imposing gate of the sprawling Mohammad Ali Jauhar University in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh, Mohd. Waseem, a carpenter, has forfeited a day's wages to support students protesting against a district administration notice.

The sit-in protest began on July 18 after the Rampur Development Authority (RDA) issued an order to demolish 38 of the 40 buildings on the campus, alleging that they had been built without approved construction plans.

The move marks a major escalation after years of State scrutiny over alleged illegal land acquisition and lease violations.

Holding a placard that places "ilm" (learning) above all else, the school dropout says he shares an emotional connection with the institution because he contributed to its woodwork. "I am here to appeal for the university to be saved. Otherwise, I fear the youngsters of the region will have to work as labourers like me."

Braving the heat and humidity, around 100 university students are huddled under a plastic tent a few metres away, raising slogans against the district administration, holding portraits of B.R. Ambedkar in their laps and copies of the Constitution in their hands. "No one is leading this protest. It is a question of our career and safety. Our parents believe in this university," says Iqra, a law student at the university, who rushed from her home in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, when the news broke. "It seems the administration has succumbed to the interests of its political masters, but our protest is anything but political," she says.

While the university administration strongly disputes the legality of the demolition order and has approached the Moradabad Divisional Commissioner for redress, anxious students find themselves caught in the crossfire between administrative enforcement and what they describe as "political targeting". "It seems the government wants to tell us that Azam Khan committed a crime by building a temple of education for us and that we have sinned by taking admission to it," says Saqib Sayeed, a postgraduate law student and a practising lawyer whose voice has turned hoarse from constant sloganeering.

Set in stone

Established in 2006 through an Act of the State Legislature by the Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar Trust under the leadership of Samajwadi Party (SP) founding member Azam Khan, the university's 250-acre campus provides higher education in diverse disciplines, including engineering, pharmacy, law and agriculture, to over 2,400 students.

It is recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and was granted minority status in 2014 after then Governor Aziz Qureshi assented to the Bill, seven years after the State Assembly passed it. At present, Khan and

I am here to appeal to save the university. Otherwise, I fear the youngsters of the region will have to work as labourers like me.

MOHD. WASEEM
Carpenter

his son, Abdullah Azam Khan, are serving prison sentences following multiple convictions, including in a forgery case involving duplicate Permanent Account Number (PAN) cards.

The Rampur district court also upheld an additional two-year prison sentence against Khan for violating the Model Code of Conduct during the 2019 Lok Sabha election campaign. During the campaign, he made derogatory "shoe-cleaning" remarks about the then District Magistrate Aunjaneeya Kumar Singh, who now serves as the Moradabad Divisional Commissioner. The ball is now in his court.

In January, Khan resigned as the chairperson of the trust, passing the baton to his sister, Nikhat Aflaq, and his eldest son, Adeeb Azam. He continues to serve as the university's Chancellor. People in his inner circle say the move was intended to safeguard the university's interests from what they describe as "political vendetta" against him.

Invoking Section 27(I) of the Uttar Pradesh Urban Planning and Development Act, 1973, in his order, District Magistrate Ajay Kumar Dwivedi, who is also the Vice-Chairman of the RDA, noted that only the university's medical college building and one academic block had valid construction approvals obtained from the district panchayat.

The administration maintained that because the management had previously secured approvals for those two buildings, it was fully aware of the legal requirements governing the remaining 38 structures.

Sources say the move stemmed from the 2023 Income Tax raid, which pointed to discrepancies in valuation and alleged underreporting of the cost of the structures, including two mosques.

The university's principal argument is that most of the campus was constructed before 2016. At that time, the area where the university is located did not fall under the RDA watch. It contends that the university came under the authority's jurisdiction only in 2024. Therefore, it argues, the RDA's regulations cannot be applied retrospectively. Advocate Kashif Sarvat, a member of the university's legal team, says they presented no-objection certificates issued by the then Gram Panchayat for the buildings, which, like those of any educational institution, were constructed over time. However, he says, the District Magistrate decided to proceed with the demolition order.

False impression

The students allege that the district administration is trying to hollow out the university by creating panic among them. "A day after the notice, a camp was organised just outside the gate where district officials, along with agents and faculty members from a government college and an upcoming private university in Moradabad, tried to terrorise students about their future by creating a false narrative that the university was going to be demolished soon," says Sayeed, wondering how the buildings could be illegal if the UGC recognised the university's degrees. "Even if they are, a penalty can be imposed."

Azra Fatima, who enrolled in the Bachelor of Education programme after completing a B.Sc. in Zoology,

says she has devoted five years to the university because she has faith in its faculty and academic environment. "We have empathy for the students sitting at Jantar Mantar because their struggle is also about education, but right now our focus is on saving our campus."

It was only after Vice-Chancellor Prof. Zaheeruddin sent a notice to the District Magistrate, invoking an Allahabad High Court order of 2019, that the camp was removed two days later. "I can't comment on the details because the matter is sub judice, but we have a strong legal basis. An appeal has been filed before the Commissioner's court. Further, we can invoke Article 226 before the High Court and Article 32 before the Supreme Court," says Prof. Zaheeruddin, adding that the law itself recognises that certain construction-related violations may be addressed through regularisation, compounding or post facto approval.

"Why can't the powers that be respect a centre of education that serves students from all communities in Rampur?" the Vice-Chancellor says. A senior professor of law at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) before joining the university after his retirement, he claims: "Every year, the administration tries to create the impression that the university is on the verge of closure to drive students away, perhaps creating a situation where it is reduced to a structure that can be bulldozed under some regulation. If push comes to shove, we will teach students on the road."

A centre of education and Islamic learning, Rampur is remembered as the birthplace of Mohammed Ali Jauhar, the freedom fighter and journalist who co-founded the Khilafat Movement and Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. He served as president of the Indian National Congress in 1923. Jauhar also held the rare distinction of serving as president of the All-India Muslim League. After the Non-Cooperation Movement and the publication of the Nehru Report, he distanced himself from the Congress. Though Jauhar died in 1931, long before the demand for a separate Muslim State crystallised, his association with the League gives right-wing elements fodder to question Khan's decision to name the university after Rampur's most celebrated son.

Contrasting image

Rampur, the Lok Sabha constituency once represented by India's first Education Minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was home to institutions such as the Raza Library and Madarsa Aliya, which attracted researchers from across the world. Over the years, the city has lost much of its educational and cultural sheen due to a combination of geopolitical shifts, economic stagnation and political polarisation. Today, the nearest government university is in Bareilly, about 70 km away.

Khan's supporters say he sought to restore the city's lost glory by building a university on the lines of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's vision for AMU, catering primarily to the underprivileged. Akseer Ahmad, a student with a disability who graduated from AMU, says he shifted to Jauhar University because it offers greater fee concessions to Persons with Disabilities (PwD) than other institutions.

Usman Ali, an engineering student, says he availed himself of the quota for wards of single mothers. Female students speak of the safe and affordable bus and rickshaw services provided by the university. "In the city of knives, Azam Khan has placed a pen in the hands of the poor, but it seems the government wants to snatch it away," says Angel Bharti, a Class 12 student who hopes to pursue undergraduate studies at the university.

Khan's detractors, however, point to the criminal investigation and court case involving the alleged theft of thousands of rare books, ancient manuscripts and antique furniture from the 250-year-old Madarsa Aliya, which investigators claim were recovered from the university's central Mumtaz Library, modelled on the U.S. Capitol Building. The protest has once again brought into focus the university's grand buildings, inspired by architectural landmarks from around the world.

The Rabindranath Tagore Auditorium incorporates elements of classical Greek architecture, while the administrative block is reminiscent of Hyderabad's Falaknuma Palace.

The seven-storey water tank has an elevator leading to a serene artificial lake beside the Kosi riverbed. A replica of the Ashoka Pillar stands in the central courtyard facing the mosque, creating a striking visual axis. Positioned prominently beside this axis is a decommissioned Soviet-era T-55 battle tank.

From allegations of using enemy property to charges of forcibly acquiring farmers' land and non-payment of labour cess, the university has for years faced administrative and legal action arising from multiple State government investigations. However, the latest demolition notice has softened the stance of even some of Khan's fiercest critics. The common refrain is that even if government funds were misused to build a private university, the money was ultimately public. "Demolition is no solution," says Mohd. Danish, an advocate, pointing out that even the administration converted the university's medical college into a COVID-19 facility during the pandemic.

Fasahat Ali Khan Shanu, once a close associate of Khan and now a Muslim face of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), says just as no one can erase Madan Mohan Malaviya's contribution to Banaras Hindu University, no one can take away Khan's role in establishing the university. However, he adds, "It is time the government takes it over."

He has submitted a memorandum to the Commissioner to this effect.

However, as it is a minority institution, stakeholders acknowledge that taking it over would require a substantial legislative exercise.

Political fallout

As delegations from Opposition parties and social organisations flock to the campus in support of the students, the issue is increasingly taking on a political colour a year ahead of the Assembly election, generating sympathy for Khan. Asim Raja, Khan's chief election agent and media in-charge, who oversees organisational work in his absence, sees the demolition notice as yet another attempt by the State government to "divert attention" from its failures and polarise the electorate.

He admits that the protest has helped paper over the cracks within SP. The party's Rampur MP, Mohibullah Nadvi, whose candidature was pushed through by party president Akhilesh Yadav despite Khan's reservations, has also come out in support of the university.

Awdhesh Sharma, a grassroots BJP worker, says the city stands with the students and their future, but there is no love lost for Khan.

"We all know the kind of influence and pressure he used to build his dream project and how it has remained mired in controversies. The issue might strengthen the SP's vote bank, but it is not going to pay dividends beyond Rampur."

Political observers and senior bureaucrats believe that the ruling party stands to gain more from the developments. There is a perception that even if Khan has lost some of his political heft, a large section of Muslim youth, not just in Rampur but across Uttar Pradesh, still sees him as a defender of minority identity and a counterweight to the Hindutva onslaught.

"Azam Khan's name helps the BJP polarise elections in at least 150 constituencies across Uttar Pradesh. It appears that keeping his spectre alive in a Muslim-majority constituency is not a bad bargain. His resurgence in the run-up to State polls is more of a headache for Akhilesh Yadav, as the seasoned politician is known to bargain hard with the party president for seats," says a senior bureaucrat, requesting anonymity.

When he was out on bail in 2025, a party insider says, his proximity to Azad Samaj Party leader Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan created a major political buzz, sending the SP leadership into a tizzy. There are whispers at the protest site about whether Akhilesh, who has largely maintained a strategic distance from what are seen as "Muslim issues", will raise concerns over the proposed demolition of Khan's pride and joy with the same vigour that he displayed over the paper leak issue. For now, to quell speculation, a high-level party delegation led by Mata Prasad Pandey, Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, has met the District Magistrate.

Personal battle?

Those tracking Khan's legal trajectory under the current administration will recognise that Commissioner Singh has been the central administrative figure behind the legal and regulatory action against Khan's political and institutional empire.

The Sikkim-cadre IAS officer joined the Uttar Pradesh cadre on inter-cadre deputation in 2015, when the SP government was in power in the State. Owing to successive extensions granted by the Central government at the request of the Uttar Pradesh government, his deputation has stretched into an unprecedented 11-year tenure in his home State. With his current tenure officially ending on August 14, a section of people in Rampur links the recent developments to his future. Singh rejects the suggestion, saying the demolition order reflected the District Magistrate's assessment. "He felt compounding was not possible because the entire layout had not been approved. I know that health and education are of paramount importance. Within the framework of the law, we need to find a way out," says Singh.

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Mohd. Waseem, a carpenter holding a placard advocating "ilm" (learning), at the protest. ANUJ KUMAR