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SC to decide on T.N.'s quota for Muslim converts

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to give judgment on a Tamil Nadu appeal seeking confirmation of the State's power to frame policy on quota to backward classes, most backward classes, denotified communities and Scheduled Castes who convert to Islam. » PAGE 3



Jharkhand govt. holds talks with restive students

PATNA
A delegation of the Jharkhand government on Friday held talks in Ranchi with student protesters demanding an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for alleged irregularities in competitive exams for government jobs. » PAGE 5

Rahul says Cong. will take up issue of ethanol in fuel

NEW DELHI
The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Friday stepped up his attack on the Modi government over the blending of ethanol in petrol, alleging that E20 fuel was "stealing" from people. He said the Congress would take up the issue "in a big way". » PAGE 4

Akali Dal chief's meet with PM fuels tie-up talk

NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH
With Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, speculation about a possibility of an alliance with the BJP has once again taken centre stage ahead of the 2027 Punjab Assembly polls. » PAGE 4

Maggi row: Delhi HC quashes case on lead content

NEW DELHI
More than a decade after the row over alleged excessive lead content in Maggi, the Delhi High Court has quashed criminal proceedings against Nestlé India officials and distributors, noting that subsequent scientific testing found the product's lead content to be within the permissible limit. » PAGE 2

Pak., Saudi Arabia, Turkiye ink defence deal

The agreement pledges 'collective response' to armed aggression against any member
Deal will strengthen security, promote 'peace and stability in region', says joint statement
Pact is 'a defence-oriented partnership' that does not target any country: Turkish govt.

Stanly Johny

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkiye on Friday signed a joint defence agreement in Mecca committing "collective defence" and "collective deterrence", at a time when Saudi Arabia is under attack from Yemen's Houthis and West Asia remains engulfed in the ongoing war against Iran. The three countries, an oil-rich Persian Gulf kingdom, a South Asian nuclear power and a NATO member, said the pact was aimed at strengthening "collective deterrence" and declared that an armed attack against any one of them would be treated as an attack against them all. The agreement was signed at the Mecca Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence, attended by Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. According to a joint announcement issued by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry, the leaders, who met at Al-Safa Palace in Mecca after an invitation from Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz, reviewed bilateral ties among the three countries as well as a range of regional issues before signing what was described as the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement. It added that the pact reflected their commitment to strengthening collective security while promoting "peace, security, and stability in the region and beyond, in pursuit of a secure and prosperous future." A Turkish government source said the agreement is "a defence-oriented partnership" that does not target any country. "It seeks to strengthen commitments to preserving regional and global peace, stability and prosperity through burden-sharing and collective security," the official added. The agreement was signed as West Asia grapples with a months-long security crisis involving multiple actors. The war the U.S. and Israel launched against Iran on February 28 remains unresolved. Over the past five months, all Arab Gulf countries came under repeated attacks from Iran. Last month, after an attack on an airport in Yemen, the country's Iran-aligned Houthis (Ansar Allah) launched attacks on Saudi oil facilities and imposed a maritime blockade on the kingdom's Red Sea ports.

all aspects of defence cooperation among the three States," suggesting closer military coordination and broader security collaboration. The participation of Turkiye and Pakistan also underscores the growing strategic alignment among the three Muslim-majority countries. Turkiye has sought a more prominent security role across the wider West Asia, while Pakistan, a nuclear-armed country, has sought to play a bigger role in the region in recent years, both as a security partner and as a mediator (between Iran and the U.S.). In Iran, Ebrahim Rezaei, a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, criticised the deal on X, saying it would not bring security to Saudi Arabia. (With inputs from AP)



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif pose after signing a trilateral defence agreement in Mecca on Friday. REUTERS

source said the agreement is "a defence-oriented partnership" that does not target any country. "It seeks to strengthen commitments to preserving regional and global peace, stability and prosperity through burden-sharing and collective security," the official added.

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Quantum quest



Curious minds: Visitors explore installations at 'QUANTUM', the latest exhibition season launched at the Science Gallery Bengaluru on Friday. J. ALLEN EGENUSE

Meta ramps up censorship of protest, political reels

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Posts by political leaders, parties, Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) members, and ordinary protesters have started disappearing from Instagram at a rapid pace, following tense meetings between the company's leadership and the Union government. The Indian Youth Congress, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal, CJP spokesperson Saurav Das, and the news portal Scroll are among those whose posts have been blocked in India.

FULL REPORT ON » PAGE 5

Is data protection law crippling RTI, asks SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine if the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, can be used to cripple the Right to Information Act by classifying all data as "personal" and, separately, gag investigative journalists. "The earlier law (RTI Act, 2005) gave certain access with conditions. Here (2023 Act), there is an en bloc embargo. Is this latter law repugnant to the earlier law? This has to be looked into with extreme circumspection," Justice Jyotsna Bagchi remarked.

Different domain

He said the RTI law operated on a "much larger domain" than the DPDP Act. It covered all forms of data, while the DPDP law was only concerned with data in a digital form. The court said this even though acknowledging that the data was now overwhelmingly in the digital format.

The judge said the court would examine if this restrictive or "cautionary approach" to sharing data under the DPDP Act worked to repeal earlier transparency laws.

The court was hearing multiple petitions challenging provisions of the DPDP Act, primarily Section 44(3), which had amended the RTI Act to facilitate public authorities to blankly refuse information on the ground that the details sought were of a "personal" nature. The petitioners submitted that the provision has turned the fundamental right to privacy on its head. The right, meant to protect ordinary citizens against



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SUPREME COURT



State incursion, has been extended to protect the State and public functionaries from RTI disclosures. They have argued that Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act has amended Section 8(I)(j) of the RTI Act. Originally, the RTI provision had exempted authorities from disclosing personal information to an applicant if the details sought had no relationship to any public activity or if disclosure would amount to unwarranted invasion of privacy. Even then, the government had to disclose if public interest outweighed privacy. One of the petitioners pointed out that the 2023 Act threatened to have a grave impact on investigative journalism. "The Act was not granting an exemption to journalists. If a journalist is reporting, they would have to seek the consent of the data principal. If the data principal wants to erase the data, they can do it. This has a direct effect on investigative journalism," the counsel submitted. The court said journalists cannot be considered a "special category" with unrestricted access to data.

14-year-old Thai student guns down seven people

Associated Press
NONTABURI

A student opened fire at a high school outside Bangkok on Friday, killing at least five persons and wounding more than 20, according to authorities. He also appeared to have killed his two grandparents earlier in the morning, authorities said. The 14-year-old shooter took his own life at the school, officials said. Five school staff members, including teachers and administrators, died in the shooting around 10 a.m. at Debsirin Nonthaburi School in Nonthaburi Province northwest of Bangkok, Deputy Interior Minister Polapee Suwunchwee said. The boy also killed his grandparents at the home he shared with them prior to the school shooting, Mr.

Polapee said. Bangyai Hospital, about 5 km from the school, said 23 people were wounded, of whom 10 were in critical condition. A witness said students hid inside a classroom while they heard gunshots from another building before police officers knocked on the door and cleared a way for them to leave the building. Amporn Niamfuang, who owns a restaurant 50 metres from the school, said there was the sound of a single gunshot and then a pause. "And then there were multiple continuous shots," he said. Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, speaking after touring the school, confirmed reports that the shooter was 14 and had killed himself. He said the student had shown signs of stress connected to school.



Dark day: People gather outside the site of a shooting incident in Bang Krui district in Bangkok, Thailand, on Friday. REUTERS

The gun, described by police as small and compact, was legally registered to his grandfather, he said.

Classes suspended

About an hour after the shooting, people stood outside comforting one another as police and first responders walked around the co-educational state school, which has an enrolment of about 3,000 students ranging from 12 to 18 years old.

All classes will be suspended between August 10 and August 14, and school staff have been instructed to work from home during that time, the school said. After the shooting, police went to his home and found both grandparents dead of apparent gunshot wounds, regional police Commander Wattana Yee-jen said. The student appeared to have shot them before attending school as normal. He waited until classes started and began shooting inside his classroom before walking out and firing more shots, Police spokesperson Trairong Piwpan said. Several family members, including his uncle and sisters of the grandfather, who were at the family home while police investigated, said he usually kept to himself and was a good student. The family members said they were unaware of any troubles he faced at home or school. Thailand has one of the highest rates of gun ownership in Asia, second only to Pakistan and far surpassing its Southeast Asian neighbours.

INBRIEF



Shah likely to hold meeting with TMP chief over alliance

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to hold a meeting with Tipra Motha Party (TMP) founder Pradyot Kishore Debbarma and Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha in New Delhi on Saturday to stitch an alliance for the upcoming village committee (VC) polls in the tribal council area of the northeastern State, a party leader said. Elections to 587 VCs will be held in the first half of next month. “Mr. Debbarma and party general secretary Brishaketu Debbarma are scheduled to visit Delhi during the day for the meeting. BJP’s Northeast coordinator Sambit Patra is also expected to remain present,” TMP MLA Ranjit Debbarma said. PTI

3 paraded with barbed wire around their necks in M.P.

Three men were paraded with bundles of barbed wire around their necks as locals kicked, punched and beat them with slippers over suspicion of theft in Madhya Pradesh’s Chhindwara district, police said on Friday. A video of the assault has gone viral on social media. It shows a group of people, including security guards of the State-run Western Coalfields Limited (WCL), targeting the men over cable theft in the Iklehra township, police said. Police inspector Khemchand Patel said action will also be taken against those who assaulted the youths. PTI

Cauvery row: when enemy countries can hold talks, why not States, says Vijay

T.N. CM makes his stand clear, says his government is firm in pursuing legal remedies and will never compromise on State’s rights on sharing of Cauvery water or Mekedatu dam construction

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Friday said it was his idea to visit Bengaluru to hold talks with the Karnataka government on the issue of sharing Cauvery water.

“When even enemy countries hold talks to resolve disputes, there is nothing wrong with neighbouring States holding discussions,” Mr. Vijay said, while replying to a special calling attention motion in the Legislative Assembly on the Cauvery water-sharing issue and the proposed Mekedatu dam.

‘Worth an attempt’

Making it clear that his government remained firm in pursuing legal remedies, the Chief Minister said he had nevertheless felt it was worth making an attempt to visit Bengaluru.

“I thought about it and sought to do it. There were many views and opinions on my proposed visit to



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay during the State Legislative Assembly session in Chennai on Friday. PTI

Bengaluru. I saw it as a positive step towards resolving the problem. Even if I had to face humiliation in that attempt, I was prepared to do so for the sake of the people of Tamil Nadu. I thank everyone who expressed their affection and support,” he said.

Mr. Vijay said the Cauvery was the State’s lifeline and an emotional issue, and asserted that his government did not have “even an iota of intention” to politicise it.

Recalling the unanimous Assembly resolution opposing the Mekedatu project, and its subsequent transmission to the Prime

Minister, he said the government had not stopped with that.

“When we learnt the Union Minister of State for Jal Shakti had not presented the full facts regarding the Mekedatu issue, we wrote to the Prime Minister again, quoting relevant portions of the final order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and the Supreme Court judgment. We urged him not to grant administrative or any other approval to Karnataka for the construction of the dam,” he said.

The Chief Minister asserted that his government would never compromise

on Tamil Nadu’s rights in relation to the sharing of Cauvery water or the construction of the Mekedatu dam. “That is our stand,” he said.

Referring to the Assembly debate in 1969 on Karnataka’s decision to construct dams across the Cauvery, Mr. Vijay asked, “Who was the Water Resources Minister then? I do not indulge in cheap politics by asking who permitted Karnataka to construct those dams. That is not our objective, because the Cauvery issue must be handled with utmost care.”

He also recalled the remarks of the then Leader of the Opposition, P.G. Karuthiruman, who had said: “We should not worry about which party gets the credit. This is a problem concerning the people of Tamil Nadu.” Mr. Vijay said the Assembly had then debated the need for the two States and the Centre to hold discussions on the issue. “The situation, however, changed completely later,” he said.

Maggi controversy: Delhi HC quashes lead content case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

More than a decade after the controversy over alleged excessive lead content in Maggi, the Delhi High Court has quashed criminal proceedings against Nestlé India officials and distributors, noting that subsequent scientific testing found the product’s lead content to be within the permissible limit.

Justice Madhu Jain, in a judgment pronounced on Thursday, said continuing the prosecutions would amount to an abuse of the process of law as the very scientific foundation of the cases had substantially eroded following fresh tests conducted by the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) under the Supreme Court’s supervision.

The court consequently quashed the criminal complaints, the summoning orders issued in 2015 and 2016, and all consequential proceedings against the retailers and other persons in the supply chain of Nestlé.

The cases arose from samples of Maggi noodles collected by Delhi food safety officials during the nationwide sampling drive in

May 2015. Food analysts had reported that the lead content in the tastemaker exceeded the permissible limit of 2.5 parts per million (ppm), while one complaint also alleged misbranding over the “No Added MSG” declaration. Based on these findings, complaints were filed under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, leading to criminal prosecution against retailers, suppliers and representatives of Nestlé India.

‘Permissible limits’

The petitioners argued that the prosecutions could not survive because the Bombay High Court had in 2015 set aside the nationwide ban on Maggi noodles after finding that the laboratories whose reports formed the basis of the ban lacked the statutory accreditation under the Food Safety and Standards Act. They also relied on subsequent testing by accredited laboratories and the CFTRI, which reportedly found the lead content to be within permissible limits. Justice Jain said, “This court is of the considered view that permitting the present prosecutions to continue would serve no useful purpose.”

BJP suspends 9 workers over slogans at rally

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The BJP on Friday suspended nine party workers following an outcry over slogans, allegedly berating Kashmir women, raised during a rally celebrating abrogation of Article 370 in south Kashmir’s Anantnag on August 5.

“It has been unanimously decided to initiate strict disciplinary action against those found responsible for organising and participating in the unauthorised rally,” said the BJP.

The BJP said it took serious note of the objectionable and derogatory remarks.

Meanwhile, suspended BJP workers tendered apology on social media platforms over sloganeering.

Police question Ittija; attempt to silence PDP, says Mehbooba

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The J&K police questioned Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leader Ittija Mufti on Friday, a day after an FIR was filed against the party and its leaders following street protests in Srinagar on August 4 to mark the seventh anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5. J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah described the arrest as “a fixed match”.

Ms. Mufti arrived at the Kothibagh police station in Srinagar around 2 p.m. and was subjected to on-camera questioning for around two hours. The FIR mentioned PDP president Mehbooba Mufti and her daughter Ittija.

Ahead of Ms. Ittija’s



PDP leader Ittija Mufti on her way to the police station, in Srinagar on Friday. IMRAN NISSAR

questioning, Ms. Mufti addressed party workers at PDP headquarters in Srinagar. She alleged that the police FIR was an attempt “to silence the party”.

Mr. Abdullah said, “This is nothing but a fixed match and an attempt to divert attention from the Banta Hai comment by its leader [Mehbooba].”

Slender-billed vultures bred in captivity take first flight into the wild

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Five slender-billed vultures bred in captivity at the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)’s conservation facility in Assam were released into the wild on Friday, marking the first such release anywhere in the world.

The birds, along with five captive-bred white-rumped vultures, were transported from the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre at Rani near Guwahati and released at the Jatayu Soft Release Centre in the Biswanath Division of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

BNHS deputy director Sachin Ranade said that captive-bred white-rumped vultures (*Gyps*



The vultures were bred in captivity at the BNHS facility in Assam. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

bengalensis) had been released earlier. “This is the first such release of the captive-bred slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*) in the world,” he said.

He said the 10 scavengers were shifted from the Rani centre three months ago for acclimatisation at a vulture-release aviary in Biswanath’s Tewaripal area.

‘Trouble engine’: Oppn. attacks U.P. govt. after Governor flags lapses in Gorakhpur varsity

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

A day after Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel pointed out various deficiencies in the functioning of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, the Opposition parties on Friday hit out at the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, saying the “Gorakhpur Model” had been exposed.

In her address to students during the university’s 45th convocation ceremony, the Governor said, “Of the six hostels for boys, two are under repair. While there is a mess facility in the girls’ hostels, the boys’ hostels lack this amenity. Instead, the boys receive their meals through a tiffin service. Do



SP chief Akhilesh Yadav said Governor Patel had exposed the ‘Gorakhpur Model’. FILE PHOTO

you believe this is satisfactory?” “These deficiencies need to be resolved within three months. This is Gorakhpur, the city of our Chief Minister [Yogi Adityanath]. How can such conditions persist here?” remarked the Governor.

In a post on X tagging a video of Ms. Patel’s speech,

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav said in Hindi: “While exposing the ‘Gorakhpur Model’, the scandal surrounding the ‘Gujarat Model’ has also surfaced. The common denominator between the two is the BJP and rampant corruption. Mutual conflict has turned the ‘double engine’ into a ‘trouble engine’.”

‘Misgovernance in State’ Congress national secretary Shahnawaz Alam said the Governor’s views validate the Opposition’s allegations about misgovernance in the State.

“The administration in Uttar Pradesh has collapsed completely, which forced the constitutional functionary to speak openly,” he said.

Bihar model schools get a fresh coat of ‘sunshine’ after paint mandate

Amarnath Tewary
BEGUSARAI/VAISHALI

In view of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government’s recent decision to repaint and rename all 551 model schools for Classes 9 to 12 across Bihar as “Saraswati Vidya Niketan”, the schools have begun repainting their exterior walls in the prescribed “sunrise” colour – a shade that closely resembles the saffron colour associated with the BJP.

The exterior walls of B.P. High School in Begusarai, where Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and State Education Minister Mithilesh Tiwari visited on July 19 and announced the new scheme, were painted in the sunrise colour. The prescribed name was also printed on polymer signboards in what school prin-



The exterior walls of B.P. Inter School in Begusarai repainted according to the government’s directive. AMARNATH TEWARY

cipals described as a “just three days’ haste”, with lakhs of rupees spent on the exercise. However, school principal Kamini Kumari wondered why the school, which had been painted afresh only a few days earlier, had to be repainted following a fresh government directive.

“We’ve to follow whatever directive or guideline comes from above,” Ms. Kamini, who also teaches chemistry, told *The Hindu*.

The main gate of the school, established in 1888, now bears a board identifying it as Saraswati Vidya Niketan, B.P. Inter School, Begusarai. “From July 16 to 18, we engaged nearly 50 workers to give the building a fresh coat of the suggested colour and completed the work ahead of the Chief Minister’s visit,” added Ms. Kamini.

District Education Officer Manoj Kumar said, “Begusarai district has 18

blocks, but we have four additional model schools because the district is large. Work is under way in every model school as per department’s guidelines.”

State directive

The Bihar State Educational Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd., which looks after the renovation and construction of government schools, issued a letter on July 7 to all its district units regarding the repainting of the schools. It prescribed the following colour scheme: “External Wall – Sunrise (0526 – Asian Paints); Border – Chocolate Brown Enamel (Asian Paints); Interior – Xtra White (Asian Paints); Doors/Windows – Golden Brown Enamel (Asian Paints).” The letter instructed that the directive be implemented “as soon as possible”.

JU ragging death: after 3 years of court dates and police station visits, father still awaits justice

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

Three years after his 17-year-old son allegedly died following ragging at Jadavpur University’s (JU) main hostel, the victim’s father continues to wait for justice, with trial hearings repeatedly postponed and several people named in the university’s internal inquiry yet to face action.

The young student fell from the second-floor balcony of the university’s main hostel, located beside the Jadavpur Police Station, on August 9, 2023. He had allegedly faced ragging, harassment and mental torture at the hands of other hostel boarders, including former and then current university students.

The chargesheet was



Students protesting against ragging at Jadavpur University. FILE PHOTO

filed in October 2023, and the trial began in March 2024. However, speaking to *The Hindu*, the victim’s father said that justice has continued to elude him even after continued visits to the court and police station.

He said that no one turns up for the hearings, which are now under way at the Protection of Chil-

dren from Sexual Offences court in Kolkata, and the dates are postponed each time. “I am completely alone, poor and powerless. Why should I have to bear the burden of losing my child when the people who abused him and caused his death are roaming about freely?” the father asked.

So far, the Kolkata police have arrested 12 people in connection with the case. However, the victim’s father said that the internal inquiry conducted by the university had identified several other accused persons in connection with the incident.

“What happened to all these people who were named in JU’s own internal investigation? Why have they not been brought to justice?” the victim’s father said.

TCS case: AIMIM corporator arrested

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The police have arrested Mateen Patel, a corporator of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), from Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar in connection with the TCS harassment case on Friday. The arrest follows a non-bailable warrant issued against Mr. Patel for failing to appear before the court despite summons.

Mr. Patel has been accused of sheltering Nida Khan, the main accused in the case. The case pertains to allegations of harassment at the Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) office in Nashik. Earlier, the district administration had demolished Mr. Patel’s house and office structures for alleged illegal constructions.

SC to deliver verdict on T.N. govt.'s quota for Muslim converts

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI



The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to pronounce judgment on a Tamil Nadu government appeal seeking confirmation of the State's power to frame and implement policy to provide reservation benefits to members of backward classes, most backward classes, denotified communities and Scheduled Castes who convert to Islam.

A Bench headed by Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra reserved orders on the State government's stand that it has the authority, based on the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission, to issue community certificates to eligible persons. The State, represented by senior advocates Mukul Rohatgi and Siddharth Luthra, said the object behind its government order of March 9, 2024 was to ensure that "persons belonging to socially and educationally backward communities are not deprived of reservation benefits solely on account of conversion to Islam".

The State appeal was directed against a Madras High Court decision quashing the March 2024 order

as unconstitutional. The High Court judgment of June 25, 2026 had held that "a person who embraces Islam cannot claim the status of backward class (Muslim)".

Justice Mishra orally observed that a 1951 judgment of the Madras High Court in *G. Michael vs. S. Venkateswaran*, regarding a Scheduled Caste member who converted to Christianity and wanted to contest in a reserved seat, had held the fort for 75 years by upholding the constitutional validity of Paragraph 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950.

Paragraph 3 stipulated that no person who professed a religion different from Hinduism (later amended to include Sikhism and Buddhism) should be deemed to get the benefits of a Scheduled Caste member.

Opposition wants FCRA Bill scrapped or referred to JPC

Congress makes Home Minister's statement on 'police brutalities' against protesters a prerequisite for any debate; Trinamool leader flags 'communication gap' between govt. and the Opposition

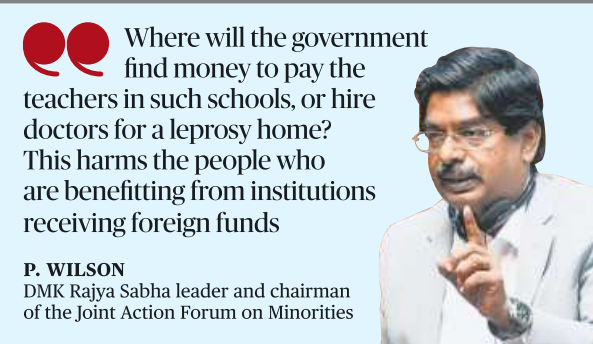
Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties want the government to either scrap the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill (FCRA) 2026, which is expected to come up for debate in Parliament next week, or refer it to a Joint Committee of Parliament (JPC) for review.

According to sources, the INDIA bloc will take a call on Monday on the modalities of opposing the Bill. The Congress, meanwhile, wants a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah on the police action against protesters before any debate on the FCRA Bill or any other legislation.

"A statement by the Home Minister on the police brutalities and excessive use of force on students protesting at Jantar Mantar is a prerequisite to a discussion on any Bill in both Houses of Parliament," Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh told *The Hindu*.

Congress general secre-



tary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said the party would oppose the Bill and would not allow the government to pass it amid disruptions. "The government is bringing this Bill to target NGOs and minorities, while allowing an organisation like the RSS to continue getting foreign funding," Mr. Venugopal said.

The Opposition has questioned Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma announcing that the Bill would come up for debate on August 12, at a time when the Union government has not given any clarity on when it will be taken up. The tentative government business announced in both Houses does not mention the

FCRA Bill. Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha floor leader Derek O'Brien said: "This is demeaning Parliament and it shows a complete breakdown of communication between the government and the Opposition".

In a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday evening, DMK Rajya Sabha leader and chairman of the Joint Action Forum on Minorities P. Wilson submitted a memorandum detailing concerns over the legislation. The memorandum notes that under the proposed legislation, if an FCRA certificate is cancelled, surrendered or lapses automatically, foreign contributions and all assets created from them

would vest in a government-appointed "designated authority", without a prior hearing or judicial determination.

Mr. Wilson said that if a fresh certificate is not obtained within a prescribed period, the assets could be sold or transferred to a government department, with the proceeds going to the Consolidated Fund of India. The existing right to reclaim assets upon re-registration would be removed, and the founding institution would be permanently barred from reacquiring them.

Mr. Wilson argued that the impact would ultimately be felt not by FCRA beneficiaries alone, but also by patients receiving treatment in hospitals funded through foreign contributions, students studying in institutions dependent on such funding, and elderly people in care homes. "Where will the government find money to pay the teachers in such schools, or hire doctors for a leprosy home? This harms the people who are benefitting from institutions receiving foreign funds," he said.

Christians need legal clarity on FCRA Bill: Meghalaya BJP MLA

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI



A. L. Hek

Amid Union Home Minister Amit Shah's outreach to Christian groups ahead of the likely discussion and passage of the Foreign Contribution Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in the Lok Sabha next week, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislator from Meghalaya has said the Christian community is seeking not just assurances but legal clarity on the proposed legislation.

A.L. Hek, BJP MLA from Pynthorunkhrah in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills district, told *The Hindu* that Christian institutions are the "largest providers of charity in remote and tribal areas", and their work should not be curtailed.

"The main concern is whether the proposed law strikes the right balance between regulations and the constitutional freedom of the charitable and religious institutions," Mr. Hek said, citing the work of the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa among the vulnerable communities in India and abroad.

On Thursday, Mr. Shah met an 18-member delegation representing all Christian denominations and as-

sured them that the proposed legislation is "religion-neutral" and that the "government has no intention to harass the Christian community, or any faith community for that matter".

'Religion-neutral' Bill

Asked if the assurances were enough to assuage the concerns of the community, Mr. Hek said, "The assurance is appreciated. However, the Christian community is looking not only for assurances but also for legal clarity and fair implementation of the law."

The BJP leader said a wider consultation is required with all stakeholders before the Bill is taken up for passage in Parliament. He said he has sought an appointment with the Home Minister but is yet to get one.

No renewable energy project within 1 km of border: govt.

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI



Projects proposed between 1 km to 20 km from the border will require an NOC.

Amid surge in applications for solar, wind and hybrid renewable energy projects in border areas, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued new national security guidelines, introducing a blanket ban on such projects within 1 km of the international border and mandating security clearance for projects located up to 50 km away.

The guidelines impose restrictions on foreign participation and staffing, stating that the applicants should not engage engineers, staff, employees, labour from Pakistan, Bangladesh and China without the MHA's permission.

It added that project developers will not be allowed to transfer land to foreign companies without

prior approval from the Central government and security clearance from the MHA.

Due to national security

Under the guidelines, all solar, wind and hybrid energy projects proposed within 50 km of the Line of Control (LoC), Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the international border will

require security clearance from the MHA. Projects located in the first kilometre from these borders have been declared a "restricted area", where no project activity will be permitted.

The MHA says the move was prompted by a rise in queries received by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) regarding the suitability of setting up renewable energy projects in border areas that could have national security implications. Projects proposed between 1 km and 20 km from the border will require a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), while proposals located anywhere within the broader 50 km zone will need the MHA security clearance. Both approvals will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, it says.

Woman raped by three civic volunteers in Bengal; one held

Senjuti Sengupta
KOLKATA

A young woman was allegedly taken captive and raped repeatedly over three days last week by three civic volunteers in Dhupguri, West Bengal, according to local officials.

Police have arrested one of the perpetrators. According to the officials, the three accused abducted the victim from Mekhliganj village in Cooch Behar and took her to a rented accommodation in Jalpaiguri's Dhupguri locality.

"She was kept hostage for three days and raped repeatedly before being released on August 2. Initially, she was too terrified to approach law enforcement, but she finally lodged an FIR against them

on August 5," said Jalpaiguri Rural Superintendent of Police Sautam Bandyopadhyay.

One accused, Bulbul Alam, was arrested on Thursday and sent to police custody for four days.

"We are searching for the two other accused. All of them have been working as civic volunteers in Dhupguri," he said.

Condemning the incident, the Trinamool Congress cornered the BJP government over the sharp deterioration of women's security in State.

Taking to X, the Trinamool Congress wrote, "This incident has once again raised serious questions about women's safety across the State. What happened to all the tall promises made by BJP leaders?"

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Conflict of interest in selecting expert panels to disburse public funds for technology start-ups is "unavoidable" and a matter "to be managed," Technology Development Board (TDB) secretary Rajesh Pathak said on Friday.

His remarks came after the government disclosure in Parliament on July 30, followed by media reports, that members of an expert panel constituted by the TDB had financial links to companies that they adjudicated as eligible for public funds.

The TDB, affiliated to the Department of Science and Technology (DST), is among the agencies selected to channel money under the Centre's ₹1 lakh crore Research, Develop-

Some committee members have links to firms approved for Technology Board funding

ment and Innovation (RDI) Fund. As of July, the TDB has approved support for 22 projects – a company can be part of multiple projects – involving ₹2,192 crore of RDI financing.

In response to questions from Congress MP Praveen Chakravarthy in the Rajya Sabha on July 30, the DST identified the members of TDB's Investment Committee. The committee is chaired by Dr. Saurabh Srivastava and includes K.R.S. Jamwal (Tata Industries), Lalithesh Katragadda, Sudhir Mehta, Sanjay Nayak, Anand Deshpande, Gopal Srinivasan, Debashish

Bhattacharjee, Bala C. Deshpande, Jaswinder Ahuja and Sudhir Sethi, with the TDB secretary serving as member-secretary without voting rights.

The same parliamentary disclosure stated that several companies approved for TDB funding had received funding from organisations represented on the Investment Committee or TDB's Governing Board.

"When we were formulating guidelines, it was clear that conflict of interest was unavoidable because experts (in identifying technology start-ups) will almost certainly have direct or indirect financial connections to the innovation ecosystem. However, such conflicts of interest can be managed, and we have clear guidelines," said Mr. Pathak.

SC dismisses plea for SIT probe in Justice Varma currency case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday rejected a petition filed by a lawyer seeking Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe into the alleged discovery of burnt currency at the official residence of former Delhi High Court judge, Yashwant Varma, after a blaze in March last year.

Justice P.S. Narasimha observed orally that the petition filed by Ghanashyam Upadhyay was a shot at "cheap publicity".

Mr. Upadhyay said the criminal liability related to the allegations surrounding the discovery of the burnt currency would survive the resignation of Justice Varma in April 2026. The lawyer contended that the resignation has deprived the former judge of any immunity from prose-

Justice Narasimha observed orally that the petition was a shot at 'cheap publicity'

cution. A three-member in-house committee of Punjab and Haryana High Court, Chief Justice Sheel Nagu, Himachal High Court Chief Justice G.S. Sandhawalia and Karnataka High Court Justice Anu Sivaraman had submitted a fact-finding report to Chief Justice of India (now retired) Sanjiv Khanna on the incident in May 2025.

Former Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna had asked Justice Varma to resign or face impeachment proceedings. The report was subsequently referred to the President of India and the Prime Minister by the Chief Justice.

NTA experts leaked NEET questions via notes, messaging apps, says CBI

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which recently filed a chargesheet against 13 accused persons in the NEET-UG 2026 examination paper leak case, has alleged that the subject experts engaged by the National Testing Agency (NTA) leaked questions through handwritten notes, following which they were circulated via digital messaging platforms.

The accused experts included Manisha Sanjay Havaladar for physics, Manisha Gurunath Mandhare for biology, and P.V. Kulkarni for chemistry.

Ms. Havaladar translated one set and "back-translated/proofread" three sets of questions. According to the CBI, she allegedly remembered the questions and noted them down after



Those arrested in the NEET-UG paper leak case are being investigated by the CBI. ANI

returning from the NTA's "confidential section" premises. The questions were allegedly passed first to accused Tejas Harshadkumar Shah, a physics faculty at a Pune coaching centre, the Dr. Abhang Prabhu Medical Academy (APMA).

The biology questions were allegedly sent from Ms. Mandhare to Pune-based beauty salon owner and alleged intermediary

Manisha Sanjay Waghmare, who also collected chemistry questions. Ms. Waghmare forwarded them to Dhananjay Lokhande, who in turn passed them to Shubham Khairnar for onward distribution. The questions allegedly reached Yash Yadav in Haryana's Gurugram before being distributed further to Mangilal Biwal, Dinesh Biwal, and Vikas Bi-

wal from Jaipur, Rajasthan, among others.

Mr. Kulkarni allegedly used the plain sheets made available for rough work to note down on small chits the chemistry questions in brief as well as their answers, and took them out of the NTA premises in a concealed manner. The agency found that experts were not frisked and their possessions were not checked during entry or exit. The accused did back-translation work for three sets of questions.

The chemistry questions were allegedly circulated through two parallel channels, one involving Ms. Waghmare and another through a Latur-based doctor named Manoj Shirure. The doctor shared them with Shivraj Mote-gaonkar, the owner of the RCC Coaching Institute in Maharashtra's Latur, the CBI has alleged.

India brushes off foreign criticism over draft legislation

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Breaking its silence over concerns expressed by international stakeholders regarding the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment (FCRA) Bill, 2026, the Ministry of External Affairs on Friday said that "legislative matters concerning India are internal affairs".

"We have seen the comments. Legislative matters concerning India are our internal affairs to be decided by our Parliament. May I point out that several nations, including the U.S. regulate the flow of foreign funds," Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson, External Affairs Ministry, said.

On August 4, U.S. Congressman Riley Moore had described the upcoming amendments to the foreign



Randhir Jaiswal

funding regulation rules as a "clear attack against Christians". "If this Bill proceeds in this way, it would be a point of major concern in our bilateral relationship with India," Mr. Moore had said in a social media post.

The Bill is expected to be taken up next week and Home Minister Amit Shah has held a series of consultations with Christian leaders and religious organisations.

The Delhi High Court on Friday raised concerns over the continued use of Jantar Mantar as the designated venue for protests in Delhi, with Justice Amit Mahajan questioning whether public agitations should be held in the middle of the capital. "According to me, these things should not happen in the city," Justice Mahajan said in oral remarks. The court was hearing a petition by the All India Dalit Christian Rights Protection Committee seeking a direction to the Delhi Police to decide on its request for permission to hold a peaceful protest at Jantar Mantar on August 10.



Pay wall

Removing UPI's free nature will not only be unpopular but also unfair

The government's decision to allow banks and payment processors to levy a charge on UPI transactions, while still pending, has already led to several policy questions. No official decision has yet been announced, but the preparations are apparent. The only official change that has been made is the amendment to the Payment and Settlements Systems Act that will now allow the government to notify which types of transactions can attract a charge. This was done through the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which was passed in the Lok Sabha recently without a debate. Before this law, UPI and RuPay debit card transactions were expressly exempt from any charges. Government sources say that the charge could be allowed only for transactions conducted by large merchants with turnovers of more than ₹1 crore-₹1.5 crore and for transactions above ₹2,000 in value. This would limit the charge to only about 5% of all UPI transactions. However, the amended law gives the government the ability to widen this scope. The fear also is that merchants will pass this cost on to consumers, who will move back to cash, which remains free to use. That said, the issue must also be looked at from the point of view of the payment ecosystem. UPI was made free in 2020. The payments players have argued that they have been bearing the cost of maintaining and running UPI since then. As Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra recently said, “somebody has to pay” for UPI. Presumably, he meant that “somebody” should no longer be the payment processors or banks.

However, the burden of the cost has not solely been borne by these players. Taxpayers are already bearing some of it. In 2021, the government introduced a scheme where it paid these payment processors and banks a subsidy to partially cover the cost of processing transactions up to ₹2,000 done by small merchants. The government has already paid about ₹11,349 crore on this, with another ₹2,000 crore budgeted for 2026-27. The question is whether consumers and merchants should be asked to pay an additional charge when some of their taxes are already being used for this purpose. There is also some anger over the perception that the government pushed people towards UPI through demonetisation, only to now allow it to become chargeable. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has argued that such a charge will help payment players invest more on infrastructure, innovation, and security. The RBI has the resources to pay for UPI's development. Using this would entail a small reduction in the vast surplus that it transfers to the Centre each year, but it would save the government from an increasingly unpopular decision.

Prudent approach

The RBI did well to hold interest rates, but inflationary pressures remain

There was little room for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s interest rate-setting committee to manoeuvre during its meeting in early August. Elevated global crude prices over the past few months had already pushed retail inflation beyond the central bank's 4% target, with headline CPI rising to 4.38% in June, the highest in the current CPI series. While the outcome was a foregone conclusion, leading the RBI to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% for the fourth consecutive meeting, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra's post-MPC statement suggests that the central bank's principal concern has, for some time now, been containing the fallout of mounting geopolitical uncertainties on India's macroeconomic fundamentals. The recent dollar-rupee swap and the decision to absorb the hedging cost on fresh Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits are clear indications of the RBI's focus. The objective is twofold: to maintain adequate domestic liquidity as the rupee weakens amid capital outflows, while shoring up foreign exchange reserves as the merchandise import bill swells on the back of elevated crude prices. Foreign exchange reserves have now climbed close to \$700 billion, while FCNR(B) deposits have risen to around \$40 billion and are expected to grow further before the scheme closes. The rupee, which until recently was the worst-performing Asian currency, has recovered to around ₹95.

However, the MPC's assessment that inflationary pressures are not yet broad-based and remain largely confined to food and fuel may prove premature. Higher fuel costs have affected sectors including transport, food, travel, and tourism. Inflation in transport services more than doubled to 4.31% in June from 1.75% in May. Although the Centre cut commercial LPG prices for a second consecutive month in July, it is unrealistic to expect restaurants and eateries to pass on these savings immediately. Passenger vehicle manufacturers have also raised prices this year, reflecting higher input and logistics costs. While U.S. President Donald Trump has indicated a possible truce and a durable arrangement to secure navigation through the Strait of Hormuz, the Ukraine war continues to threaten supplies from Russia, India's largest crude supplier. Even so, the RBI's decision to prioritise growth while remaining alert to inflationary pressures from global supply shocks is underpinned by India's relatively strong domestic fundamentals. Merchandise exports grew 15.5% year-on-year in June, consumption demand has remained resilient, and public and private investments continue to strengthen. Governor Malhotra's assertion that future policy decisions will remain “data dependent” and that the RBI will adopt a “wait-and-watch” approach is arguably the most prudent course.

The evolution of public administration has reached a critical juncture today. The sheer complexity of modern governance has outpaced the legacy tools traditionally used to manage it. Kerala has long enjoyed a distinguished reputation built upon its enduring strengths: a highly educated citizenry, robust public institutions, and an enlightened tradition of public discourse. Yet, these historic achievements risk being undermined if the State's administrative machinery continues to rely on fragmented information flows, delayed reporting, and rigid, department-centric silos.

In an era defined by real-time data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), and systems-level coordination, relying on annual reports and retrospective reviews is no longer just an operational inefficiency; it has become a structural hazard. Upgrading these systems is not an exercise in technocratic ambition, but rather a fundamental requirement for institutional credibility, fiscal discipline, and responsible statecraft.

Across Kerala's administrative ecosystem, most departments continue to design, execute, and evaluate their public schemes within narrow, isolated boundaries. Key sectors such as health, power, local self-government, social welfare, finance, agriculture, and education operate with incompatible reporting formats and disconnected review cycles. Crucially, the overwhelming majority of these programmes lack real-time monitoring. Regulatory leakages, cost overruns, beneficiary exclusion, and execution delays are discovered months after the fact, when corrective intervention is both administratively expensive and politically constrained. Fiscal leakages go undetected across departmental lines, policy failures are identified only after public resources are completely exhausted, and administrative accountability shifts to merely explaining errors away. For a State that prides itself on exceptional human development outcomes, this structural vulnerability is inexcusable.

Modern public policy does not operate in isolation; it functions as a highly interconnected web of cause and effect. A rural housing scheme directly alters electricity demand; energy pricing reshapes household economics. These economic shifts subsequently influence nutrition and community health outcomes, which ultimately dictate workforce productivity and long-term fiscal capacity. When administrative departments optimise solely for their individual mandates, the State loses its ability to anticipate or manage these critical second-order effects.

A real-time digital nervous system

This is precisely where AI-powered governance dashboard becomes a strategic necessity. Such a platform is far from a cosmetic overlay of digital charts and superficial indicators; it functions as a



Shashi Tharoor

Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including, most recently, 'The Sage Who Reimagined Hinduism: the Life, Lessons and Legacy of Sree Narayana Guru'

Annual reports are no longer enough and Artificial Intelligence can make the State a model for smarter governance

The changing logic of the India-U.S. partnership

The Trump administration's latest tariffs on several trading partners, including India, are widely seen as another trade dispute. That interpretation misses the larger picture. Alongside growing demands for greater burden-sharing, tighter technology restrictions and a more reciprocal approach to international partnerships, the tariffs reflect a broader shift in American statecraft. Washington is increasingly judging partners and competitors through the lens of national interest rather than strategic convergence. The immediate impact will be felt in trade negotiations; the more enduring implications are strategic. They signal a changing American approach to alliances and partnerships with important implications for India.

This approach reflects what the Trump administration describes as 'flexible realism'. Unlike the post-Cold War liberal international order, this approach places national interest at the centre of American foreign policy. It treats trade, technology, industrial policy, and security as integrated instruments of statecraft. Partnerships are judged less by shared values or historical goodwill than by the tangible strategic and economic value they deliver. Rather than signalling a retreat from global engagement, it recalibrates how the United States pursues its interests in an increasingly competitive international environment.

The China factor

It is useful to recall the strategic logic that has underpinned the India-United States partnership over the past decade. With China's emergence as Washington's principal strategic competitor, India assumed growing strategic importance in the U.S.'s calculations. Defence cooperation expanded, the Quad gained momentum, technology partnerships deepened, and supply-chain resilience became a shared priority. While democratic values provided a favourable political backdrop, it was the convergence of strategic interests driven by China's rise that gave the partnership its real momentum. For both



G. Venkat Raman

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India's challenge is to build capabilities that make it an indispensable U.S. partner

living institutional nervous system. By integrating live data streams from all departments, public utilities, and local bodies, it can track public programmes end-to-end, from the initial budget allocation and fund release to ground-level execution and actual beneficiary outcomes. Machine-learning models can automatically flag anomalies, delays, cost escalations, and implementation gaps as they occur, providing predictive alerts that allow leadership to intervene before an administrative hitch escalates into a public crisis. This approach transitions informed decision-making from a distant aspiration into a daily institutional discipline.

The true value of this integrated digital architecture becomes apparent when it is applied systematically across core administrative sectors. In public health, real-time monitoring of hospital capacity, medicine inventories, ambulance response times, and disease surveillance can actively prevent system overloads rather than just document them after a crisis. AI-driven alerts can detect emerging public health stress at the district and panchayat levels, enabling rapid, localised interventions. Similarly, within the power and energy sector, integrating data on electricity generation, distribution losses, subsidy flows, and rooftop solar adoption onto a single platform, allows energy policy to be managed as a dynamic fiscal and infrastructure system, safeguarding grid stability and mitigating financial drain.

This transparency is equally vital for Kerala's celebrated decentralised governance model. Local self-government institutions can leverage these dashboards to track project execution, fund utilisation, and citizen grievance resolution timelines, ensuring that local autonomy is matched by clear visibility. In the domain of social welfare, where multiple schemes frequently target the same households through different departments, real-time database reconciliation can instantly flag duplication or unwarranted exclusions, ensuring welfare spending remains efficient. Finally, in public finance, moving away from delayed financial reconciliation toward live visibility of treasury cash flows and committed liabilities directly reinforces fiscal discipline and state credibility.

Towards results

This shift fundamentally transforms a political culture where review meetings have historically functioned as retrospective rituals characterised by static presentations and selective indicators. An automated dashboard alters this dynamic by making performance continuous, visible, and cross-institutional. Responsibility moves from episodic justification to real-time ownership. Public officers receive structural protection through objective, unmanipulated data, while senior political leadership gains high-level clarity without resorting to micromanagement. Far from

New Delhi and Washington, managing the geopolitical consequences of a more powerful China became the principal driver of bilateral cooperation. This shift in American statecraft does not diminish India's strategic importance, but it does redefine the basis on which that importance will be judged. Strategic convergence with the U.S. remains important, but it can no longer be assumed to be the principal driver of the relationship. Washington is increasingly likely to assess even close partners through the lens of reciprocal economic benefit, technological capability, and strategic contribution. Consequently, India can no longer assume that intensifying U.S.-China competition will, by itself, continue to enhance its strategic relevance. The partnership must increasingly rest on what India brings to the table than on China's rise alone.

The next phase

The more significant implication of this evolving approach is that it redefines the nature of strategic partnerships. The first phase of the India-U.S. relationship was shaped by strategic convergence driven by China's rise. The next phase will increasingly depend on strategic complementarity, with each country expected to contribute capabilities that reinforce the other. Defence cooperation, critical technologies, resilient supply chains, and advanced manufacturing will matter not merely because they help manage China's rise, but because they strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of both economies. The India-U.S. partnership is therefore evolving from one defined primarily by a shared strategic challenge to one sustained by mutual strategic value. Far from weakening the relationship, this evolution could make it more balanced and resilient.

If flexible realism encourages Washington to rely on stronger and more capable partners, it also creates greater space for India's strategic agency. A more economically competitive, technologically advanced, and militarily capable India is not only a more valuable partner for the

weakening the civil service, this system actively strengthens public institutions.

State ownership matters

To ensure that this transformation is credible, the reform must be anchored in a concrete, State-owned digital architecture. Though there is a strong case for decentralised governance, and those who generate data must continue to “own” it, senior leadership will need a unified oversight to interpret live feeds, highlight deviations from targets, simulate the downstream impact of proposed policy adjustments, and recommend evidence-based course corrections. This architecture would collapse the time lag that routinely paralyses governance, centralising operational visibility while keeping execution authority properly distributed.

To ensure that this advanced technological framework strengthens democracy rather than unsettling it, robust legal and institutional guardrails are mandatory. All data must remain the sovereign property of Kerala, held in trust for its citizens and managed in compliance with Indian data protection laws. Every AI-generated alert or policy recommendation must be fully auditable, preserving clear decision logs for statutory oversight, vigilance reviews, and legislative scrutiny. In democratic governance, algorithmic transparency is a necessity, ensuring that executive efficiency never erodes legislative authority or constitutional balance.

Furthermore, layered over existing infrastructure such as the e-Kerala systems embedded across village offices, this real-time awareness acts as a vital safeguard for State resources. By interfacing lawfully with secure national data verification systems, the State can seamlessly authenticate beneficiary eligibility, track the end-to-end delivery of subsidies, and align property records to close long-standing loopholes in revenue leakage. When identity, entitlement, and transaction data converge under strict legal oversight, fiscal pilferage becomes structurally difficult, protecting the State from systemic financial strain.

The cost of administrative inaction in an increasingly digitised world is exceptionally high. Bureaucratic morale suffers when officers are forced into defensive post-hoc explanations rather than proactive problem-solving.

Transitioning to an AI-driven governance model would signal that public funds are treated as sacred capital, and that democratic administration can be both deeply humane and technologically precise. It bridges the gap between political intent and actual delivery, turning the ideal of collective administrative responsibility into a measurable, 21st-century reality. And once again, Kerala could set a model for the rest of India in how AI can be channelled constructively to improve democratic governance, rather than undermine it.

U.S. but also better positioned to pursue its own strategic interests. The relationship can therefore evolve from one shaped primarily by China's rise to one anchored in India's capabilities and strategic contribution.

For India, this evolution reinforces rather than weakens the relevance of strategic autonomy. In the emerging international environment, strategic autonomy is not about maintaining equal distance from competing powers; it is about preserving the ability to make independent choices based on India's own interests. That also means that India's approach to China should increasingly be guided by its own long-term strategic calculations rather than by the trajectory of U.S.-China relations. In practice, this requires a strategy of multi-alignment: strengthening the strategic partnership with the U.S., managing competition and cooperation with China on India's own terms, and deepening strategic, economic, and technological partnerships with the European Union, Japan, and Global South.

Looking ahead

The India-U.S. partnership is entering a new phase. During the past decade, its momentum was driven by a shared response to China's rise. That strategic convergence will remain important, but it will no longer be sufficient on its own. In this emerging strategic environment, enduring partnerships will increasingly be built on capability, reciprocity, and strategic value. For India, this carries a broader strategic lesson. India's strategic relevance must increasingly flow from its own economic dynamism, technological capabilities, defence preparedness, and diplomatic influence. The challenge, therefore, is not merely to remain relevant in Washington's strategic calculus, but to build the capabilities that make it an indispensable partner. That would not only strengthen the India-U.S. partnership but also reinforce India's strategic autonomy in an increasingly contested world.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ensure debate

The repeated disruptions in Parliament are disappointing as they prevent meaningful discussions on issues that directly affect citizens. Parliament is meant to be a forum where different views are expressed through

debate, not a place where proceedings come to a standstill. The Opposition has an important responsibility to question the government, while the government must be willing to address concerns and engage in constructive dialogue. When both sides

remain unwilling to cooperate, public confidence in democratic institutions suffers. People expect their elected representatives to focus on governance rather than political confrontation. With several important national issues demanding attention,

Parliament must function effectively and uphold the spirit of democracy. Respectful debate, accountability, and cooperation are essential for the institution to truly serve the people.

Vinayak M. Rayla,
Aurangabad, Maharashtra

Exceptional craft

It was through this daily that I learned about the handloom weaver from Telangana who presented a silk sari, small enough to fit inside a matchbox, to the Sri Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple. Such craftsmanship

deserves greater recognition. There must be better promotion and awareness of handloom products.

Masanam Renuka Bhavani,
Hyderabad

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

GROUND ZERO



Sakshi Chaudhary, Preeti Pawar, and Priya Ghanghas after winning gold medals in boxing at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Haryana's golden girls

Four women from Haryana's Bhiwani, known as India's Mini Cuba of boxing, won gold at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Their victories are especially significant in a district long associated with one of India's most skewed sex ratios. **Ashok Kumar** traces their journeys of grit, the barriers they overcame, the people who inspired them, and how their success is reshaping attitudes towards girls

In the heart of Dhanana village, in Haryana's Bhiwani district, where most houses have unplastered brick walls, one conspicuously stands out. It is a sprawling *kothi* or bungalow, just a stone's throw away from the bus stop. A temple spire rises from its courtyard, reaching for the grey sky.

It is the overcast morning of August 4. Two days earlier, the curtains had come down on the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland. Inside the *kothi*, there is no time to wait for the sun. Despite a light drizzle, two painters stand on ladders on opposite corners of the compound, brushes in hand. They have a day to complete their work. Sakshi Chaudhary is coming home, with a gold medal.

Inside the *baithak* (sitting room), there is plenty of commotion. Sakshi's father, Manoj Dhanda, a farmer, is pacing, phone glued to his ear. He is trying to finalise a Haryana cabinet minister for the felicitation.

A few feet away, his friend Wazir Singh, a former serviceman, is negotiating with a local Ragini singer – a folk art form that blends poetry, storytelling, and music. Ticking off his list, he says, “500 chairs for the elders. Ladoos, jalebis, hot tea, coffee, and paneer pakoras for everyone.”

In the corner, Kaptan Ghanghas, a brick kiln owner, is multitasking. Shouting instructions to a man nearby, he says, “I want 150 banners. All up by tomorrow. I want the entire 20 kilometre-route [from Bhiwani city to Dhanana] covered.”

He then picks up his phone and asks in the same authoritative tone, “How many bikes? How many tractors? Talk to all the academies nearby. I need numbers.”

Hundreds of motorcycles, tractors, and cars have been arranged for the procession for Sakshi and Priya Ghanghas, also a gold medalist from the same village. Invitations have been sent to all 84 khap panchayats.

India's record-breaking boxing campaign at the 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, which culminated in 10 medals – seven gold and three silver – was powered by an unlikely but familiar force: Bhiwani, popularly known as India's Mini Cuba of boxing. Four of these gold medals were won by women nurtured in the town's celebrated boxing culture: Sakshi Chaudhary (51 kg), Preeti Sai Pawar (54 kg), Jaismine Lamboria (57 kg), and Priya Ghanghas (60 kg).

A smiling Wazir sums up the mood: “Our daughters are our VIPs.”

A dream realised a generation later

For Sakshi, the road to Commonwealth glory began 14 years ago when she was just 12 years old.

Manoj still remembers the day he took Sakshi and her elder brother Aman, now a Captain in the Indian Army, to a Haryana government talent identification programme designed to spot sporting talent at an early age. “She scored a perfect 21 out of 21 points,” he recalls with pride. “At the time, every youngster in Bhiwani wanted to become the next Vijender Singh (who won a bronze medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics). Sakshi too caught the boxing bug.”

Choosing the sport changed her life. Now an Indian Army havaldar, Sakshi produced one of the finest performances of her career in Glasgow. Facing England's Ruby White in the 51-kg final, the Indian dominated all three rounds with composure and aggression, ending Ruby's unbeaten streak of 68 consecutive fights.

“We spoke to Sakshi a day before the final,” says Manoj. “She told us she would give it her best shot. We watched every second of the bout with bated breath. When the referee raised her hand, what we felt is beyond words.”



Most of them in these villages want to escape poverty and make a name. That hunger is what drives Bhiwani boxing.

VIJENDER SINGH
Olympic medalist in boxing

Sitting quietly behind her husband, her face covered with a veil, Sakshi's mother Sheila says that following her daughter's career has taught her a surprising amount about boxing. “I know terms like knockout, charging, uppercut, and hook,” she says, shyly.

Sport has always been close to Sheila's heart. As a teenager, she played kabaddi. Her father's friend, the Haryana wrestler Chandgi Ram, tried to convince her family to allow her to take up wrestling, but they never agreed.

Today, Sheila feels that her own unfulfilled sporting dream has been realised through her daughter. “I'm just waiting to hug her,” she says, her voice choking with emotion.

Channeling the energy

Priya's family eagerly awaits the return of the youngest of Haryana's four women boxing gold medalists. The family recently moved from Dhanana to Dabra Colony in Bhiwani, where preparations to welcome their champion are in full swing. A cake sits ready on the table.

Her mother, Meera, recalls the emotional moment when she and her husband, Mahender, a stone crusher contractor, received Priya at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport in the early hours of August 4. “I had prepared *churma* (mashed up roti in ghee and jaggery) for her,” Meera says. “She was happy to eat it after returning home.”

According to her family, Priya and her elder brother Neeraj were so energetic and mischievous that their parents channelled their boundless energy into sport. “It turned out to be the best decision we made,” says Meera.

Bright, disciplined, and eager to learn, Priya impressed her coach immediately. Within just two days of training, the coach told the family that the girl had the potential to go far.

That prediction came true. At just 20, Priya has won a gold at the Commonwealth Games. Her success has also brought financial stability to the family, with Priya joining the Indian Railways in October 2025.

Meera says many talented athletes do not get the opportunities that her daughter received eventually. “There is little support before players become successful,” she says. “I know many talented children who had to quit boxing because their families simply couldn't afford the expenses.

The government helps only after a player wins major tournaments.”

The girls who bring glory

For a region long associated with one of India's most skewed sex ratios, Bhiwani and neighbouring Charkhi Dadri are now telling a different story. In 2011, Bhiwani had 886 females per 1,000 males, compared with the national average of 943. Today, daughters are increasingly seen not as a burden, but as a source of pride.

“People are focusing more on their daughters than their sons,” says Sheila. “They have realised that girls can often achieve more if they are given the right opportunities. They can become doctors, engineers, and bring glory to the country through sports.” In contrast, she worries that many young boys are falling prey to drug addiction.

Few people have witnessed the change more closely than Kaptan, who credits Manoj with planting the seeds of a boxing revolution. “It was Sakshi's father who convinced many families to send their daughters to the boxing ring,” he says. “This year, two girls from our village have become Commonwealth champions. In 2022, Nitu Ghanghas won gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. If our village is producing champions today, a large share of that credit belongs to him.”

Wazir says a public felicitation for Sakshi and the other champions is being planned to not just honour them, but also to inspire the next generation. “If these girls can do it, then the daughters of every family here can do it,” he says. “The message to parents is simple: support your daughters and give them every opportunity possible.”

Jagdish Singh, founder of the Bhiwani Boxing Club that produced Olympic medalist Vijender Singh and others, says every medal won by a female boxer attracts more girls to the sport. “After Nitu won the gold in 2022, the number of girls joining the club surged,” he says. “Vijender's Olympic bronze was the first big turning point.”

At his club, boys and girls now train in nearly equal numbers. He also runs a hostel for 20 girls; 16 of them currently stay there.

Singh, who coached Sakshi, expects another spike after these Games. “More girls will now take up boxing as a career,” he says.

Vijender Singh says all the five Bhiwani gold medalists – four women and Sachin Siwach – are from nearby villages: Mittathal, Dhanana, and Badesara. “Most of them in these villages want to escape poverty and make a name. That hunger is what drives Bhiwani boxing,” he explains.

Family legacy

Jaismine Lamboria, the third woman gold medalist from Bhiwani, believes that the biggest challenge for many girls begins long before they step into a ring. “Unlike boys, who often simply inform their families about their ambitions, girls frequently have to seek permission to play, travel, and pursue their dreams,” she says. Social expectations and family concerns, she adds, can be



I know many talented children who had to quit boxing because their families simply couldn't afford the expenses. The government helps only after a player wins major tournaments.

MEERA
Mother of Priya Ghanghas

barriers long before training even begins.

At the same time, she sees encouraging signs of change. “Families are becoming more supportive, women are receiving greater opportunities, and institutions are opening more doors for female athletes,” she says. These developments, she believes, show that the playing field is gradually becoming equal.

The first woman boxer to join the Indian Army, 25-year-old Jaismine comes from a family steeped in boxing. Her great-grandfather, Captain Hawa Singh, won the National Championships for 11 consecutive years, while her uncles, Sandeep and Parvinder, are international boxers.

When she first shared her ambition with her mother while in Class 8, the family had some concerns, but they never discouraged her. Her uncle convinced them that if athletes such as Sakshi Malik and P.V. Sindhu could bring glory to the country, Jaismine could do the same. With a coach in the family, her boxing journey took off.

But Jaismine's rise was not smooth. Before the Commonwealth Games, she battled a prolonged illness that left her with recurring fever for weeks, disrupting her training and causing significant weight loss. She had little time to prepare for the competition. Yet, she fought her way to the final, where she defeated a seasoned former Commonwealth champion to claim gold. “For me, the focus was never on my opponent's reputation but on giving my best in the ring,” she says.

She has a message for aspiring women boxers: “You are second to none. Choose your dream, keep moving forward, and never stop until you achieve it. Always remember, you are strong.”

Reluctant athlete

As a teenager, Preeti Sai Pawar wanted to focus on academics. She never imagined that boxing would become her life's calling.

Preeti's family moved from Badesara village in Bhiwani to Meham in Rohtak to provide better educational and training opportunities for their children. The daughter of a Haryana Police Assistant Sub-Inspector, Preeti initially resisted boxing despite constant encouragement from her father and her coach, Vinod Pawar.

“I kept telling my father that I would rather study,” she recalls. “The training was painful and my limbs would ache. But gradually, I started enjoying it.”

The turning point came in 2019 when she clinched her first gold medal at the school nationals. “That was when I realised that I wanted to pursue boxing seriously,” she says.

After winning bronze at the 2022 Asian Games and representing India at the Paris Olympics in 2024, she won a gold at the Asian Boxing Elite Championships in March 2026. At the Commonwealth Games, she showcased tactical maturity, dominating her Canadian opponent with aggressive yet calculated boxing. After comfortably winning the opening two rounds, she entered the final round with confidence, experimenting with new skills and sealing a comfortable victory.

Her performances have also earned her a rare distinction off the ring. Last December, Preeti became the first woman boxer to be directly recruited into the Indian Army as a Junior Commissioned Officer (naib subedar). “Representing the Army gives me immense pride,” she says.

Preeti is in the final year of her B.Sc. programme in Health and Physical Education at Lovely Professional University, which has supported her by facilitating online examinations during competitions.

The four women boxers have overcome unique challenges, but they now share one dream: to make it to the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.



Gold medalist Jaismine Lamboria with her parents at their home in Bhiwani district of Haryana. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Rice and shine: Farmers transplant paddy near Shivamogga, taking advantage of monsoon rains on Thursday; the water-intensive crop, a staple across south India, has been impacted by poor monsoon in June-July and plummeting reservoir levels. S.K. DINESH

Deficit rain recorded in June and July because of El Nino, impact of the West Asia war, and some local factors in the rice growing areas have all pushed the price of various varieties upwards, writes **Rashmi Patil**

Area (in hectares) **Production (in tonnes)** **Yield (kg per hectare)**

Year	Area (in hectares)	Production (in tonnes)	Yield (kg per hectare)
2011-12	1,41,135	62,69,203	4,660
2015-16	1,10,058	46,04,569	4,366
2018-19	1,19,993	51,90,595	4,555
2022-23	1,35,251	65,30,058	4,917
2024-25	1,20,313	59,48,253	5,036

Price increase for rice varieties

Rice Variety	Price in June-July (per kg)	Price in August
Kesar Kali	₹75	₹90
Jeera Gold	₹190	₹220
Sona Masuri	₹60	₹75
Bullet (first grade)	₹65	₹74
Bullet (second grade)	₹55	₹67
Jeera	₹90	₹100

Source: Karnataka State Department of Agriculture, Year wise data of area and production of paddy cultivation in Karnataka

WEST BENGAL



West Bengal BJP president Samik Bhattacharya holds the party's flag as former Trinamool Congress MPs Sushmita Dev, Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, and Prakash Chik Baraik join his party, in Kolkata. SAIKAT PAUL

Bengal BJP fights against its ‘Trinamoolification’

Having coming to power in West Bengal earlier this year, the State unit of the BJP is facing a major political challenge, which party leaders are describing as its ‘Trinamoolification’. Implicit in this word is that several leaders from the Trinamool Congress are joining the party and being given key responsibilities, and that the BJP is embracing the very culture of the party it opposed and contested against, finds **Shiv Sahay Singh**

Days after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept the West Bengal Assembly poll in 2026, winning 207 of the 293 seats, West Bengal BJP president Samik Bhattacharya made a bold political claim. “Our doors are closed for Trinamool. There will be no ‘Trinamoolification’ of the BJP,” Bhattacharya had said. The 62-year-old leader, who had been a foot soldier of the party when its vote share was in single digits in West Bengal was among the first to use the phrase, “Trinamoolification of the BJP”.

He didn’t know then that on the afternoon of July 9, he would be handing out lotus-insignia party flags to three former Trinamool Congress (TMC) MPs at the BJP office in Kolkata’s Salt Lake area. The three MPs were Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, Sushmita Dev, and Prakash Chik Baraik. They had been nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the Trinamool Congress, and had resigned after the party suffered an electoral setback in the Assembly poll. When in the Trinamool, they had publicly criticised the BJP.

Within hours of Bhattacharya welcoming the Trinamool leaders into the BJP fold, the party announced that the former Trinamool MPs were to be renominated to the Upper House with the support of newly elected BJP legislators. Bhattacharya tried to defend opening doors for the Trinamool leaders by saying that the decision was in national interest.

“Syama Prasad Mookerjee has taught us that the party is bigger than an individual, and the nation is bigger than the party,” he said, trying hard to say that inducting the three leaders into the party was an “exception”.

The Bengal BJP president who had spoken about the party’s doors being closed for Trinamool members, is now saying that those in the Trinamool who could not raise their voices in the party are now knocking on BJP doors and the party may consider opening its doors at an opportune moment.

Feeling the heat of the Trinamoolification

A month after this incident, Bhattacharya admits that the anger among the BJP rank and file was so much that those supporters who were singing his praises during the election are putting a garland of shoes around his photograph. “Usually the garland is made of old shoes, but I saw that the shoes were all new,” the BJP leader quipped. Several BJP leaders, such as State Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta, said they found it difficult to participate in the flag hand-over event.

To many, the Trinamoolification of the BJP started even before the party won the 2026 Assembly poll. Former West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh, now a prominent Minister in the West Bengal government, took a swipe at Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari by saying that it was



We do not know what our central leadership is thinking. They want to increase numbers in Parliament. But why will (former) Trinamool leaders be nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the BJP?

NIKHIL RANJAN DEY
FORMER BJP MLA
FROM COOCH BEHAR

not new for Trinamool leaders to join the BJP. “Where is it written in the BJP that people from other parties cannot join. Our Chief Minister is also a former Trinamool (leader),” Ghosh said.

Ghosh’s reference to Adhikari points to the unease in BJP’s rank and file. Adhikari, once a key Trinamool leader and Minister in Mamata Banerjee’s government, defected to the BJP in December 2020. Adhikari, who defeated Mamata Banerjee twice at Nandigram in 2021 and Bhabanipur in 2026, was chosen to lead the BJP government in West Bengal, five years after joining the party.

Good TMC vs not-so-good TMC

After the defeat in the West Bengal Assembly poll in 2026, the Trinamool Congress has been torn apart by rebellion and desertions. The majority of Lok Sabha MPs and party MLAs decided to part ways with party chairperson Mamata Banerjee.

Despite being the beneficiaries of the Trinamool Congress’s politics, these MPs and MLAs have blamed the party chairperson for favouring her nephew Abhishek Banerjee and allowing corruption and misrule to persist.

Of the 28 Lok Sabha MPs of the Trinamool Congress, 20 have merged with the little-known Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI), and have become a part of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Of the 80 MLAs of the Trinamool Congress who were elected to the 18th West Bengal Legislative Assembly, 65 legislators decided to support the claim of Ritabrata Banerjee as the Leader of the Opposition, against the writ of Mamata Banerjee. One of the reasons behind the rebellion of both the MPs and MLAs of the Trinamool Congress is the opportunity to cosy up to the

BJP, the party in power both at the Centre and in the State.

The BJP leadership in West Bengal, which is perceived as being soft on the rebel MPs and MLAs, has come out with a theory of “*bhalo* (good) Trinamool”. The Lok Sabha MPs, who have decided to join the NDA, have allegedly been told that after delimitation, when the seats increase, so will their chances of returning to Parliament in 2029.

On August 4, Chief Minister Adhikari met the NCPI MPs in Delhi. He was joined by Union Minister Bhupender Yadav, who was election-in-charge of West Bengal, and BJP MP Nishikant Dubey. If the photograph of Samik Bhattacharya handing over party flags to the three Rajya Sabha MPs created discomfort in the BJP’s rank and file, the Chief Minister’s photograph with the NCPI MPs was reason for heartburn.

The “good Trinamool” is the rebel camp led by Leader of the Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee. Banerjee, who was a Communist Party of India (Marxist) nominee to Rajya Sabha, joined the Trinamool Congress in 2020 after the CPI(M) expelled him. The Trinamool Congress re-nominated him to Rajya Sabha for a second term in 2024. In 2026, he resigned from the Upper House to contest the Assembly poll from Uluberia Purbia.

The rebel MLAs led by his camp are claiming to be the “original Trinamool” and have sought the party’s symbol from the Election Commission and laid claim to hundreds of crores of party funds.

After the change of regime, hundreds of local-level Trinamool Congress workers have been arrested by the police on charges of corruption, extortion, and electoral violence. Many were attacked with eggs when they were being taken into custody or being produced before courts. However, the MPs and MLAs of the “good Trinamool” have not faced police action after warming up to the BJP.

Among the handful of loyalists left by Mamata Banerjee’s side is Belegkata MLA Kunal Ghosh. After an under-construction warehouse collapsed in Kolkata’s Taratala area on June 24 burying 16 workers, Chief Minister Adhikari blamed it on the former Trinamool Congress regime.

Adhikari held up a document in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly with the signature of former mayor of Kolkata Municipal Corporation Firhad Hakim, and said no one would be spared. Ghosh dared the Chief Minister to act against Hakim to prove that the State government was serious about taking action against those responsible for the deaths. Hakim, who was one of the key Ministers during Mamata Banerjee’s regime, joined the Ritabrata Banerjee camp, and despite the Chief Minister blaming him for the tragedy, the only high-profile arrest was his former personal assistant.

With the majority of the Trinamool leaders now part of the “good Trinamool” camp, it is Mamata Banerjee and a handful of her loyalists who are being blamed by the BJP for they say was “misrule and corruption” over the past 15

years. The BJP government in West Bengal is yet to complete 100 days. It is already faced with something it had accused the Trinamool Congress leadership of over the past several years: extortion and political corruption.

The reverse ‘egg therapy’

In the past three months several businesses have alleged that BJP leaders have demanded money from them and they have had to reach out to the police seeking protection.

Sources in the BJP said that the party has suspended 22 functionaries, including several mandal presidents, over allegations of extortion and indiscipline.

Senior leaders of the BJP, including party president are warning its workers against extortion. While former State BJP president and Minister Dilip Ghosh said that many leaders are becoming addicted to this “honey of extortion”, the current State BJP chief has warned party members to mend their ways.

“The unwarranted egg therapy we see now (referring to Trinamool leaders being attacked with eggs) can turn on its head and start falling on the other side as well. Everyone, including those in my party, must understand that. Those ‘Sanatanis’ who have suddenly found a place in our party and are harbouring aspirations for influence and advantage must also remain careful because the trajectory of those eggs can change in no time,” Bhattacharya said.

It is the BJP workers in the districts who are most upset with Trinamool leaders warming up to the BJP, but only a few have mustered the courage to speak about it publicly. Nikhil Ranjan Dey, a former BJP MLA from Cooch Behar, came out in public against the nomination of the three former Trinamool Congress MPs to Rajya Sabha by his party.

“We do not know what our central leadership is thinking. They want to increase numbers in Parliament. But why will (former) Trinamool leaders be nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the BJP? Are there not enough qualified and educated people in the BJP?” the former MLA said.

Dey said that several BJP workers have suffered at the hands of the Trinamool Congress and are still languishing behind the bars after being booked under what he claims are false charges during the Trinamool Congress regime.

In fact, former Trinamool leaders had once even allegedly called for violence against BJP members. One such example is of former Trinamool Congress MP and actor Nushrat Jahan, who represented the Jadavpur Lok Sabha seat from 2019 to 2024.

She was photographed with BJP leaders at an event to honour exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin. The photo went viral and was criticised by several right-wing online portals.

The portals highlighted how, before the election, the actor-turned-politician had been heard telling the electorate to beat up BJP leaders with bamboo sticks if they came seeking votes.

Personal versus the political

Sudip Bandyopadhyay is an MP from the Kolkata North Lok Sabha seat. After parting ways with Mamata Banerjee, he is the senior-most MP of the NCPI, and is now holding meetings with the BJP leadership in the national capital.

While Bandyopadhyay is meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Adhikari, BJP’s Tapas Roy, now Minister of Industries and Commerce in the West Bengal government, is fuming. “I will never have anything to do with him. I hate him, because of what he did to me,” Roy said.

The Manicktala MLA left the Trinamool Congress and joined the BJP in 2024. That year, he lost the Lok Sabha polls to Bandyopadhyay. Roy has publicly said that Bandyopadhyay was the reason he had to quit the Trinamool Congress, and join the BJP. He claims that Bandyopadhyay was behind a raid at his residence when he was with the Trinamool, a charge Bandyopadhyay has vehemently denied.

The only thing that is keeping the 70-year-old BJP leader happy: “It is very comforting to see the Trinamool Congress crumbling.”

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West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari with former Trinamool Congress MPs who have merged with NCPI, in Delhi. Three former Trinamool MPs who were nominated to the Rajya Sabha on a BJP ticket are also present. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A photograph of a white house with a red roof, partially obscured by a blue metal gate and surrounded by tall grass and palm trees. The gate is made of vertical blue bars and a horizontal bar with a lock. The house is white with a red tiled roof and is surrounded by tall green grass and several palm trees. The sky is overcast.

The vanishing villages

CM
YK



Dabur India Ltd., which was directed by FSSAI earlier this week to withdraw some of its products with the “100%” label, has secured a stay on the order from the Delhi High Court. “It is now submitted that the Hon’ble Delhi High Court has today i.e. on August 07, 2026, granted stay against the aforesaid prohibitory order of FSSAI dated August 03, 2026,” Dabur India said in a filing with the exchanges. “Any material update in the matter will be intimated to the stock exchanges in due course of time,” it added.

Hindalco Industries Ltd. of the Aditya Birla Group, for the quarter ended June 30, 2026, reported a 75% YoY growth in consolidated net profit at ₹7,013 crore driven by strong momentum in its India business and recovery at subsidiary Novelis. Novelis recorded a 37% improvement in EBITDA at ₹4,875 crore, due to the successful restart of Oswego hot mill and accelerated benefits from its cost optimisation programme, the company said.

Hero MotoCorp Ltd. has reported a 16.86% fall in consolidated profit after tax to ₹1,417.93 crore in the first quarter ended June 30 due to high base effect. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of ₹1,705.65 crore in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal. The previous year PAT included a one-time gain of ₹722 crore on account of dilution of the company's share of investment in associates consequent to public issue and private placement, the firm said. PTI

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

In a bid to stem pilot attrition and strengthen retention, Air India has unveiled a revamped pay and career progression package that includes an 8-15% increase in fixed salary, higher flying pay for hours beyond the guaranteed 40-hour threshold, and new incentives for Boeing 737 pilots to address cockpit shortages at Air India Express.

Following its privatisation, Air India introduced a 40-hour guaranteed pay structure in 2022, well below industry leader IndiGo's 70-hour guarantee, a disparity that contributed to pilot attrition. The latest

While Air India's 40-hour guaranteed pay structure remains unchanged, pilots will receive an 8-15% increase in fixed pay. Air India has also increased productivity pay for flying beyond the guaranteed 40 hours translating into higher monthly earnings as pilots fly more hours.

To encourage pilots to work at low-cost carrier Air India Express, which is grappling with a shortage of crew, a Boeing 737 fleet allowance of ₹21 lakh for commanders and ₹10 lakh for senior first officers payable over three years has been introduced for the first time.

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI



EVs logged record sales in July.

Overall Electric Vehicles (EV) retail sales in July surged 66% year-on-year (YoY) to 3,27,901 units and with this, almost one in eight vehicles retailed are now electric, as per Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA).

In July, e-two-wheeler retail sales crossed two-lakh for the first time to 2,04,362 units, up 88% with a market share of 11.2% from 7.7% a year earlier. The segment was led by TVS Motor which sold 55,499 units, up 135%.

E-three-wheelers secured 61.5% share, up from

60.3% a year ago. As many as 87,055 units of e-three wheelers were retailed which was a growth of 25.3% with this segment led by Mahindra Group which reported retail sales of 14,191 units, up 45%.

Electric commercial

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

State-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) on Friday rejected claims of chloride contamination in E20 fuel, stating that additional intensive testing conducted at retail outlets, refineries, and at the point of ethanol procurement confirmed that chloride levels remained within the prescribed limits.

In a joint statement, IndianOil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum also refuted allegations of excess moisture in the one-fifth ethanol blended petrol fuel validated from water-ingress testing.

"Contrary to certain assertions being made, based



'Clean' chit: The OMCs said 100 random petrol samples taken from varied refineries tested for "consistently low" chloride content. AP

on extensive random testing through scientifically designed tests, the evidence shows that there is no cause for any alarm on fuel contamination," they said in the statement.

The assurance from the OMCs comes days after the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM),

in a communication to the oil ministry, flagged concerns about vehicular parts experiencing wear due to excess chloride presence since the introduction of E20 petrol.

SIAM had later withdrawn the letter assuring that E20 was safe, emphasising the data they cited

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India's forex reserves jumped by \$10.512 billion to \$692.866 billion during the week ended July 31, the RBI said on Friday. The overall kitty had jumped by \$6.118 billion to \$682.354 billion in the previous reporting week.

Reserves had expanded to an all-time high of \$728.494 billion during the

week ended February 27, 2001, this year before the onset of the West Asia conflict, which led to several weeks of drop as the rupee came under pressure and the RBI had to intervene in the forex market through dollar sales.

For the week ended July 31, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by \$8.75 billion to \$ 564.68 billion, the central bank's da-

ta showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves.

It may be recalled that the central bank and the government had launched a series of measures to attract more forex flows into the country last month, including FCNR(B).

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The U.S. has "today" become India's largest supplier of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), accounting for 67% of its LPG imports, said Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri. Addressing the CII International Energy Conference, he said the shift follows an earlier decision to



Hardeep Singh Puri

source roughly 10% of India's LPG requirements from the U.S. as part of a broader effort to diversify

energy supplies. "Some of us wondered would we need the 10% [from U.S.] when we have suppliers nearby [in the Gulf]. Today, I am happy to inform that U.S. accounts for about 67% of our LPG imports," he said. Separately, he refuted reports that the government proposed to impose an additional charge on LPG and natural gas to fund a strategic fuel reserve.

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

Months after cutting almost 27% of global routes in response to soaring fuel costs, Air India will restore most international services from September 1 and add frequencies on several key long-haul routes.

Additional frequencies. "Though fuel prices remain higher than before the Middle East conflict and remain volatile, they have moderated from their initial peak, so as well as the restorations we will be adding additional frequencies," AI chief executive officer Campbell Wilson wrote to employees.



AI would also add frequencies on key long haul routes.

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Netherlands-based Wonderful, an applied AI company for enterprise, has announced the opening of business operations in India with offices in Mumbai and Bengaluru.

The company which has presence in more than 30 countries has appointed Bhavik Rathod as the managing director for India.

The company's co-founder and CTO Roey Lalazar told journalists in Mumbai that the company will be hiring in "hundreds" to serve the Indian market.

Wonderful India said it will build teams across For-



AI transformation: Wonderful's AI operating system supports multiple modalities and use cases, the company said. GETTY IMAGES

Cater across sectors
The firm will cater to enterprises across sectors, in-

cluding telecom, banking and financial services, media, healthcare and retail in India.

“Indian enterprises are moving quickly from exploring AI to identifying where it can deliver meas-

“As organisations look to scale successful deployments, they need partners who can work alongside their teams and execute at speed,” said Bhavik Rathod, MD.

Long-term growth

“We see India as a long-term growth market and are committed to building deep, on-the-ground partnerships that help organisations move from isolated AI initiatives to enterprise-wide transformation while strengthening their internal capabilities over time. Building a strong local team is central to that commitment,” he said



A wildfire burns in Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park near Mount Bromo in East Java Province on Thursday. AFP

Indonesia battles Bromo wildfire as El Nino takes root

Agence France-Presse
MALANG

Indonesian authorities battled Friday to contain a wildfire that has swept through Mount Bromo National Park on Java island, destroying more than 120 hectares as the country braces itself for an extreme El Nino-fuelled dry season.

The fire started Monday near Mount Bromo in East Java, one of Indonesia's most visited tourist destinations. Local authorities deployed two water-bombing helicopters against the flames that have razed at least 127 hectares of the national park land to date, fire official Bambang Setyo Antoko told AFP. The destroyed area is equivalent to about 180 soccer fields. "We're very dependent on wind conditions," Mr. Bambang said of the fire-fighting effort ahead.

National park official Rudijanta Tjahja Nugraha said the area on fire was in a steep, cliffside region, making it difficult for firefighters to reach.

It was not known how the fire started, but Mr. Bambang said the park was extremely dry as El Nino conditions take root in Indonesia.

Mount Bromo, famed for its volcanic scenery, previously caught fire in 2023. That blaze broke out when a couple lit a flare during a pre-wedding photo shoot and destroyed more than 500 hectares of land.

Indonesia's BMKG weather agency has warned that the 2026 dry season will be more intense and prolonged than usual, with a higher risk for wildfires and drought due in part to El Nino. According to the Ministry of Forestry, more than 1,07,000 hectares of land burned in Indonesia between January and June this year – more than double the area destroyed in forest fires in 2023.

The last El Nino helped make 2023 and 2024 the two hottest years globally on record.

'ICE will release body camera video only when it's in their best interests'

Following row over recent fatal shootings by officers, the U.S. federal law enforcement agency is set to equip field officers with body-worn cameras by the end of Sept.; but, as per ICE's policy, it will release footage of encounters only after determining whether 'it is in best interests of agency' to do so

NEWS ANALYSIS

Associated Press

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the United States (U.S.) is moving to equip officers with body cameras in the next two months but the agency's policy gives it broad control over what footage will be made public by specifying any releases must be in its "best interests."

After years of delays, ICE said its field officers nationwide will have body-worn cameras by the end of September. The rollout comes after recent fatal shootings by officers enforcing President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown have intensified pressure for accountability that the cameras could provide.

But the agency's body-worn camera policy could mean taxpayers who are pitching in tens of millions of dollars to pay for the cameras may be kept in the dark about some high-profile confrontations, at least in their immediate aftermath.

The policy says ICE will promptly release video of shootings and other encounters in which its agents cause death or serious injury only after determining "it is in the best interests of the agency" to do so. That gives its director discretion to release re-

cordings that reflect well on the agency's image while working to keep others secret, experts on body camera policies said.

Such selective releases are routine in some law enforcement agencies but usually not so clearly contemplated in policy, according to professor Christopher Schneider of Brandon University in Canada, a co-author of the new book *Police Body-Worn Cameras: Media and the New Discourse of Police Reform*.

"In some ways, ICE is saying the quiet part out loud," he said. "Body-worn cameras are being used as contemporary image-work tools to present the police to the public in the most favourable way possible."

The policy requires officers to activate cameras during routine enforcement activities, including while making arrests, executing search warrants and responding to emergencies. After shootings or other serious confrontations, a committee that includes top ICE officials and lawyers will review footage and recommend whether to release it promptly, according to the body camera policy issued in February 2025.

If the answer is yes, the recording could be released within 72 hours. But, if the ICE director finds "specific and compelling circumstances" justify withholding the video,



Demonstrators outside an ICE facility as Haitians arrive for appointments in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Sunday. AP

they have the authority to block or indefinitely delay the release, the policy says.

The policy does not elaborate on such circumstances, and the ICE did not respond to a question from AP about how it would make such decisions.

Varying practices

Practices vary widely in the U.S. In Chicago, a police watchdog agency routinely releases body camera video of shootings and other serious use-of-force incidents within 60 days. In Philadelphia, the police department very rarely uses its discretion to release video of specific incidents and has no policy for when to do so.

Even when footage is released, ICE's policy will require the redaction of all officers' identifying features such as their faces, names and badge numbers to preserve their privacy.

Schneider, who has studied body cameras since their use began spreading a decade ago, said he does not expect ICE to release footage of fatal shootings like those last month in Houston and Maine.

He noted ICE's sister agency, Customs and Border Protection, has not released footage of the January shooting of Alex Pretti in Minneapolis even though it was captured on agents' cameras. CBP Commissioner Rodney Scott told lawmakers in February that the video and other materials were under investigation and would be made public "when it's appropriate."

ICE spent \$30.9 million in July to purchase body camera equipment from Axon, the Arizona-based company that also manufactures Tasers, federal spending records show.

The spending began one day after the fatal shooting

of a 25-year-old motorist in Maine by an ICE officer with a history of violent behaviour. Days earlier, another ICE officer shot and killed a homebuilder in Houston who was driving to work. Neither shooting was recorded with body cameras. That news angered members of Congress, who had given ICE \$20 million to purchase body cameras in a Bill passed to end a partial government shutdown on April 30.

ICE said body cameras have been sent to more than half its field officers and the rest will receive them by the end of September. That timeline pushes back estimates from earlier public statements. Maine Republican Senator Susan Collins, who backed funding for cameras, said last month that the agency informed her they would be deployed by the end of August. ICE had said earlier that they would be issued by mid-September.

ICE officers working in the Houston area, where the agency sent more than 800 cameras, are among those who have started training, according to U.S. Representative Henry Cuellar, a Texas Democrat and member of the House Appropriations Committee. At least one member of every arrest team will be required to have a camera, the agency said.

"I think the American

people need to see what that officer sees and hears," White House border czar Tom Homan said July 19 on CBS News' "Face the Nation." "And if you look at the data, body cameras actually exonerate agents more than they, you know, provide evidence of wrongdoing."

Mr. Schneider said he expects ICE to release recordings that promote the agency's mass deportation programme by portraying officers as brave and immigrants as dangerous criminals. "Much of what law enforcement does is convince the public that we need them and feel safe and they do all this good stuff for us," he said.

ICE began testing body cameras in 2021 during President Joe Biden's administration and distributed 1,400 devices three years later, saying use would expand as funding became available.

After returning to office in 2025, President Donald Trump rescinded a Biden order that required federal law enforcement agencies to use body cameras.

ICE did not buy body cameras even after it received a historic \$75 billion infusion in Mr. Trump's signature policy bill in 2025 and began hiring thousands of new officers. The two July purchases from Axon were made through an existing government contract that began in 2023, records show.

Pacific nations fail to agree on joint statement against China missile test

Agence France-Presse
SUA

Pacific diplomats gathered in Fiji failed on Friday to agree on a joint statement condemning China's recent test of a nuclear-capable missile in the region, with New Zealand's Foreign Minister accusing them of appeasing "outsiders".

Beijing gave only a handful of nations short notice before test-firing an intercontinental ballistic missile last month, flexing its military might in a region where it has long sought to expand its reach. The rocket appeared to land in a patch of ocean somewhere between Solomon Islands, Nauru and Tuvalu, monitors have



Around the table: Foreign Ministers and top diplomats from Pacific Islands Forum member countries attend a meet in Fiji on Friday. AFP

said. It sparked condemnation from multiple Pacific leaders, but the 18-member Pacific Islands Forum is yet to issue a formal response to the test.

New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters said following an hours-long meeting the group had failed to agree on a statement condemning the

launch. He did not name the two member states that had blocked the statement, but China-friendly nations Kiribati and Nauru are understood to have had little interest in formally criticising one of their major partners.

"They didn't actually lay out any reasons apart from their disagreement," Mr.

Peters told journalists. He accused them of appeasing "outside partners' wishes, rather than those that belong to the Pacific Islands Forum". "We made it very clear that we do not think that outsiders should be telling the insiders – that's us who have been here for thousands of years – what our position should be," he added, a veiled swipe at China.

Tuvalu, a diplomatic ally of Taiwan, had also called for a joint statement and said it hadn't received notice in advance of the test. "We don't want to be intimidated by any powers," Pasuna Tuaga, the country's Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Labour and Trade, said on the sidelines of the talks.

Colourful canvas



Set to soar: A balloon pilot checks the internal rigging as crew members inflate a hot air balloon before take-off during the 48th Bristol International Balloon Fiesta in Bristol, England, on Friday. The annual festival is the largest hot air ballooning event of its kind in Europe. AP

Jason Arday, Claudine Gay and the line between inclusion and bias in varsities

NEWS ANALYSIS

Vasudevan Mukunth

The political scientist Claudine Gay became Harvard University's dean of social science in 2018 and, five years later, its first Black president and only the second woman in the university's 387-year history in the post. Later that year, on December 5, 2023, Ms. Gay testified before the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce on antisemitism on university campuses, following Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

Ms. Gay's answers were sensible as she tried to hold the line between students' speech and con-

duct. However, her words went viral soon after for all the wrong reasons.

A short time after, conservative activists began alleging that Ms. Gay had plagiarised her PhD thesis in 1997, a finding that a subsequent Harvard University investigation also upheld.

Ms. Gay resigned on January 2, 2024, concluding the shortest presidency in the university's history. In her resignation letter and an op-ed published soon after in *The New York Times*, Ms. Gay said she stepped down to deny the "demagogues" a chance to weaponise her 'case' against other Black scholars.

A very similar narrative is playing out in the University of Cambridge, with the

resignation of Jason Arday, who only three years ago became the university's youngest person to be appointed professor, at 37 years. Until recently, Mr. Arday was known as much for his life as his work as a sociologist. According to reports, he grew up non-verbal and autistic in South London before learning to read in his late teens.

But only months after his appointment in 2023, two academics flagged similarities in text between one of Mr. Arday's papers and a study by epidemiologist Anjum Memon. Cambridge took the implicated paper offline. Then, last year, *Times Higher Education* put together a dossier of alleged plagiarism ahead of what was to be a



After Jason Arday was appointed a professor at Cambridge in 2023, two academics flagged alleged plagiarism in one of his papers. AP

blockbuster investigative report. But when it reached out to Mr. Arday for his comment, it found he had hired a pugnacious law firm, which disputed the allegations and *Times* shelved the piece.

In July this year, University of Ghent philosopher Nathan Cofnas – infamous for his views on race and

intelligence and whose own affiliation with Cambridge ended in 2024 following a different issue – published his independent findings of Mr. Arday's work, including allegations of plagiarism in the latter's 2015 PhD thesis and in later papers. The well-regarded science integrity publication *Retraction*

Watch also reported on the spiked *Times* article on July 27, and quoted an independent expert who had reviewed its dossier.

Cambridge at first stood by Mr. Arday and cast the allegations against him as a motivated campaign to discredit a rising Black scholar. But on August 5, it launched an investigation into his qualifications, and Mr. Arday resigned with immediate effect. In his statement, reminiscent of Ms. Gay's opinion, he said the process academia uses to verify the work of scholars had been weaponised against Black people.

The real problem

Of late, universities in the Global North have been recruiting people from un-

derrepresented backgrounds in part on the strength of narratives of overcoming disadvantage and embodying the universities' commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

In both Mr. Arday's and Ms. Gay's instances, these narratives seemed to have overtaken closer scrutiny of the scholars' academic work. Chunks of the public conversation surrounding their work, including the views of Cofnas and conservative activist Christopher Rufo, who targeted Ms. Gay, have also been explicit about wanting to discredit DEI policies. Which makes it easy, and sometimes also accurate, to dismiss a complaint by pointing to the complainant. Yet

plagiarism is plagiarism.

The real problem is that the tools scholars use to police academic integrity are applied unevenly and sometimes opportunistically. Considering every finding of plagiarism against a minority scholar to be proof that DEI policies support poor scholarship is wrong.

Treating every plagiarism allegation against a minority scholar to be suspect because of who is alleging it is also wrong. Affirmative action and hiring to improve diversity are necessary policy responses to a history of elite universities excluding non-elite scholars. They don't become less legitimate due to the actions of some of their beneficiaries.

Smash, bang, whimper: the rise and fall of Bazball

Now that the most discussed and debated style of playing Test cricket since Bodyline has ended, how do we assess its legacy? What worked and what didn't? Could it have lasted longer? And how will it be remembered?

P.K. Ajith Kumar

The end came swiftly. It took New Zealand only 51.2 overs to wrap up the England second innings at Trent Bridge. Jamie Smith's slog against Mitchell Santner ended in the hands of a diving Nathan Smith, running in from long-on. That was not just the end of the third Test. It was also the end of what was perhaps the most discussed, or debated, style of playing Test cricket since Bodyline.

Breaking point

New Zealand won by 160 runs, and also became the first team ever to win a three-match series in England after losing the opening Test. It was indeed a fabulous achievement by Tom Latham's men.

For Latham's English counterpart, Ben Stokes, it was his last international match. For the coach, Brendon McCullum, it was the last Test in charge of England.

But for Bazball, we would not have witnessed Bairstow metamorphosing into Richards in 2022 or Pope turning the reverse sweep into the best form of defence in Hyderabad

Bazball thus came to its inevitable end. Ironically, it had begun with a series against New Zealand in an English summer, four years ago. And it had begun in magnificent fashion, with England winning four Tests, all chasing, all with guns blazing, in a row – three against New Zealand and one against India.

It was even more remarkable because the England Test team was going through a tough period at that time: it had won just one of 17 matches after the first Test against India at Chennai in early 2021. Coach Chris Silverwood lost his job, following the 0-4 drubbing in the 2021-22 Ashes in Australia, and after the defeat in the Caribbean in March 2022, Joe Root resigned.

So, it wasn't the most ideal of situations when McCullum was appointed as England's Test coach by Rob Key, managing director of England men's cricket. And the Kiwi had no previous experience of coaching in red-ball cricket, though he had been in charge of franchise teams such as the Kolkata Knight Riders.

McCullum conceived, Stokes executed. They will be remembered as one of cricket's most remarkable coach-captain duos. Their approach to playing Test



GETTY IMAGES



play a reverse scoop against a bowler of Jasprit Bumrah's quality.

An identical scoreline (4-1) in the most recent Ashes in Australia meant that Bazball couldn't click against stronger opposition. Bazball also worked more on flatter surfaces, while it had problems when the ball moved or turned.

Right from the beginning of Bazball, the big question was whether it was a sustainable model. As former England batter Mark Butcher told *The Hindu* recently, Test cricket is a format that dictates to you what is necessary. "If you push too hard, the game will bite you back," he said.

McCullum and Stokes had indeed pushed too hard. When you go on to lose a Test match by two wickets after declaring on the opening day with two wickets remaining, questions are bound to be asked.

Questions were also asked about how some of the England players behaved off the field during the Bazball era. The pub-incident involving Stokes and Gus Atkinson this summer didn't help, either.

The statistics may not say that England benefited much from Bazball. In 49 Tests, England scored 27 wins, but lost 20. That there were just two draws is of course hardly surprising.

But it would not be fair to evaluate Bazball's legacy just based on numbers, even if they are impressive when it comes to run-rates, strike-rates and hundreds. It was an attempt to play Test cricket in a different way and entertain the paying public.

Fun while it lasted

But for Bazball, we would not have been able to witness Jonny Bairstow metamorphosing into Viv Richards in 2022 or Ollie Pope turning the reverse sweep into the best form of defence during his monumental 196 in the Hyderabad Test. Bazball was fun while it lasted.

It could have lasted longer perhaps if England had been a little more conservative on occasion and realised that Test cricket's charm lies in its infinite variety. There is more than one way to play what is the most demanding form of all sports.

There is joy in watching Harry Brook dance down the track. There is also joy in watching Shubman Gill play a perfect forward defensive push.

Bazball could perhaps have lasted longer if England had realised that Test cricket's charm lies in its infinite variety

cricket was the kind that hadn't been witnessed before. New Zealand and India weren't prepared for the ultra-aggressive mode of cricket England played in the summer of 2022.

It was not just England's style that was spectacular. The results were, too.

Against New Zealand, England's scores in the second innings were 279 for five, 299 for five, and 296 for three. Against India, it was 378 for three. And those chases were completed at brisk strike-rates.

Chasing a big total has always been a daunting task in Test cricket. Safety first has nearly always been the mantra, and even that stunning chase by India against Australia at Brisbane in 2021 had begun on a cautious note. It took an extraordinary hook by Washington Sundar against Pat Cummins and an out-of-the-world counterattacking knock by Rishabh Pant to make India shift gears and aim for the ultimate glory.

Interestingly, Stokes once spoke of how the manner in which Pant played made him think about the possibilities of aggressive batting in Test cricket. And before Pant, there were Adam Gilchrist and Virender Sehwag, but what made the concept of Bazball different was that everyone wanted to bat as if there was no tomorrow. If a wicketkeeper as accomplished as Ben Foakes could not find a place in the eleven, it showed what McCullum and Stokes wanted.

Finding expression

What Bazball looked to do was to remove the fear of failing. So regardless of the situation, a player was allowed to play his strokes, or express him-

self, as England cricketers would explain in press conference after press conference. When England fielded, the bowlers were asked to always look for wickets; restricting the batters from making runs wasn't the priority.

And England wanted to win. An exciting – though not successful – chase was found more appealing than a draw. One was never sure if that was quite right in competitive sport. And one of the charms of Test cricket – and also what someone new to cricket would not understand – is the sheer thrill of not getting a decisive result after playing for five days, more than 30 hours.

Such trivial matters, however, didn't cross the minds of the English players, and their fans, for much of the early part of the Bazball era, as the team posted some astounding wins, like the one against Pakistan at Rawalpindi in 2022, when England scored 657 from just 101 overs. Two years later, the victory against India in the first Test at Hyderabad was even greater, as England had conceded a first-innings lead of 190.

The four Tests that followed, however, showed why Bazball can't work all the time. India won all those matches. For all England's aggressive intent, it is debatable whether a batter of Root's quality needed to



HARRY BROOK

STACKING UP



ATP Men's Top 15

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Jannik Sinner	24	13,450	16
2	Carlos Alcaraz	23	8,160	16
3	Alexander Zverev	29	8,120	19
4	Felix Auger-Aliassime	25	4,740	22
5	Novak Djokovic	39	3,760	15
6	Daniil Medvedev	30	3,620	22
7	Alex de Minaur	27	3,560	23
8	Flavio Cobolli	24	3,330	25
9	Taylor Fritz	28	2,320	21
10	Ben Shelton	23	2,680	21
11	Alexander Bublik	29	2,535	25
12	Jiri Lehecka	24	2,380	20
13	Lorenzo Musetti	24	2,375	21
14	Casper Ruud	27	2,345	21
15	Rafael Jodar	19	2,243	23

Top Indians ▶



Sumit Nagal
Rank 235 ▲ 11 spots



Manas Dhamne
Rank 362 ▲ 10 spots



F1 Drivers' standings

#	Driver	Team	Points	Wins
1	A.K. Antonelli	Mercedes	219	6
2	L. Hamilton	Ferrari	169	1
3	G. Russell	Mercedes	160	2
4	C. Leclerc	Ferrari	138	1
5	L. Norris	McLaren	128	1
6	M. Verstappen	Red Bull	109	0
7	O. Piastri	McLaren	92	0
8	I. Hadjar	Red Bull	68	0
9	L. Lawson	RB	43	0
10	P. Gasly	Alpine	42	0
11	A. Lindblad	RB	23	0
12	F. Colapinto	Alpine	19	0
13	O. Bearman	Haas	18	0
14	G. Bortoleto	Audi	10	0
15	C. Sainz	Williams	6	0
16	A. Albon	Williams	5	0
17	E. Ocon	Haas	3	0
18	N. Hulkenberg	Audi	2	0
19	F. Alonso	Aston Martin	1	0
20	V. Bottas	Cadillac	0	0
21	S. Perez	Cadillac	0	0
22	L. Stroll	Aston Martin	0	0



A.K. Antonelli



L. Hamilton

F1 Constructors' standings

Pos	Team	Points	Wins
1	Mercedes	379	8
2	Ferrari	307	2
3	McLaren	220	1
4	Red Bull	177	0
5	RB	66	0
6	Alpine	61	0
7	Haas	21	0
8	Audi	12	0
9	Williams	11	0
10	Aston Martin	1	0
11	Cadillac	0	0



Badminton Men's ranking

#	Player	Points	Events
1	Shi Yu Qi	94,255	12
2	Kunlavut Vitidsarn	91,215	16
3	Jonatan Christie	89,231	17
4	Anders Antonsen	87,705	17
5	Christo Popov	87,002	20
6	Chou Tien Chen	84,280	27
7	Victor Lai	77,045	19
8	Lin Chun-Yi	71,274	19
9	Li Shi Feng	70,483	16
10	Alex Lanier	70,215	16
11	Kodai Naraoka	70,030	20
12	Alwi Farhan	69,419	19
13	Loh Kean Yew	66,300	20
14	Lakshya Sen	65,573	21
15	Toma Junior Popov	62,697	20

Top Indians ▶



Lakshya Sen
Rank 14



Ayush Shetty
Rank 23



Test Batting

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

ODI Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Shubman Gill	801	841
2	Daryl Mitchell	794	840
3	Virat Kohli	767	908
4	Rohit Sharma	758	879
5	Ibrahim Zadran	712	756
6	Babar Azam	689	894
7	Harry Tector	679	730
8	Joe Root	674	810
9	Shai Hope	673	782
10	Charith Asalanka	659	705

T20I Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Ishan Kishan	910	910
2	Sahibzada Farhan	848	848
3	Abhishek Sharma	819	931
4	Phil Salt	799	881
5	Pathum Nissanka	751	796
6	Tilak Varma	750	845
7	Jos Buttler	748	794
8	Harry Brook	734	734
9	Mitchell Marsh	706	706
10	Dewald Brevis	702	738

Test Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Jasprit Bumrah	870	908
2	Matt Henry	861	870
3	Mitchell Starc	838	852
4	Pat Cummins	832	914
5	Marco Jansen	825	825
6	Scott Boland	820	820
7	Noman Ali	809	853
8	Kagiso Rabada	807	902
9	Josh Hazlewood	775	864
10	Nathan Lyon	753	812

ODI Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	682	775
2	Abrar Ahmed	675	675
3	Jofra Archer	649	682
4	Keshav Maharaj	645	737
5	Mitchell Santner	644	656
6	Maheesh Theekshana	641	680
7	Bernard Scholtz	610	631
8	Shaheen Afridi	604	691
9	Mehidy Hasan	602	722
10	Adil Rashid	599	671

T20I Bowling

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

B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

How Miss Giggles is laughing her way to the top

Anahat Singh recently became the first Indian squash player to be crowned Junior World champion. How did the 'very chilled', 'happy-go-lucky kid' conquer the might of Egypt? And what does the future hold for the 18-year-old who reads opponents and situations better than most?



Coming into the [World Junior championships], I knew it was my last chance and how much it meant to check it off my list. That made a huge difference. It pushed me to give it my all

ANAHAT SINGH

