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₹4,895-crore FDI
projects under
new framework

NEW DELHI
The Centre received 29 foreign direct investment (FDI) projects worth ₹4,895.65 crore under a revised framework allowing firms with up to 10% Chinese ownership to invest via the automatic route, Ministry of Commerce said. » **PAGE 11**

Pirates hijack two
vessels with 22
Indians on board

NEW DELHI
Two vessels carrying a total of 22 Indian nationals have been hijacked by armed pirates in separate incidents in Yemen and Somalia, a Shipping Ministry official said on Friday. The Indian crew aboard both vessels are safe, as per the latest information. » **PAGE 3**

Imran is shifted
back to jail after
medical check-up

ISLAMABAD
Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan was shifted back to Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on Friday after undergoing a medical examination at the state-run Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS), where doctors from Al-Shifa hospital were also present, the government said. » **PAGE 12**

CJP team attacked during
attempt to inspect school

Team tried to inspect a govt. primary school in a Rajasthan village where classes are being held in a cattle enclosure; CJP blames BJP and threatens agitation if the school is not repaired

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

A team of Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) activists was allegedly assaulted and chased out of Rampura-Kanwarpura village near Jaipur on Friday, when it attempted to inspect a government school as part of the organisation's 'School Thik Karo' campaign. The vehicles of team members were damaged, and women supporters were allegedly roughed up.

The team, led by party co-convenor Ashutosh Ranka, travelled to the village in the Bagru Assembly constituency to inspect the Government Primary School. However, some villagers had barricaded the road and checked the vehicles entering the area.

When the team of about 40 CJP workers arrived, some people confronted them and raised slogans, and asked them to leave. During a scuffle that followed, the team members were allegedly manhandled and driven out with stone-pelting. The villagers later staged a sit-in outside the school.

'BJP involved'

Mr. Ranka said one volunteer had suffered a fractured arm. He alleged that those involved in the attack had been brought in by the ruling BJP.

The school building had earlier been declared unsafe because of its dilapi-



Tense encounter: CJP workers being confronted during their 'School Thik Karo' campaign at the Rampura-Kanwarpura village in Jaipur, Rajasthan, on Friday. PTI

dated condition and was closed. Currently, classes are being held in a cattle enclosure. "We had inspected the school last year as well... It was being run in a buffalo shed even then," Mr. Ranka said. The villagers, however, claimed that the funds for school repair work had already been sanctioned.

"We had informed the police about our visit to Rampura-Kanwarpura. The police were aware of stone-pelting in the area but did not intervene," Mr. Ranka said told presspersons.

CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke announced that he would arrive in Jaipur and launch an agitation if the school repair work did not begin, and if the BJP members who allegedly attacked the volunteers were not arrested within the next 48 hours.

The CJP, which cancelled its visit to another government school in a nearby village later in the day, claimed that the confrontation in Rampura-Kanwarpura was pre-planned and had the backing of State Education Minister Madan Dilawar.

Row over order

The confrontation occurred amid a political row over a recent Education Department order imposing restrictions on the entry of outsiders into government schools and barring photography and videography without the written approval of the heads of institutions.

The order was issued after CJP activists joined an agitation by students and villagers at a school in Alwar district on August 14. The CJP has opposed the restriction and accused the

BJP government of attempting to prevent public scrutiny of the condition of government schools.

The party's 'School Thik Karo' campaign seeks to assess the condition of school buildings, availability of teachers, and other facilities and academic arrangements.

The incident also spilled over into the Rajasthan Assembly, where the BJP and the Opposition Congress traded allegations. Education Minister Mr. Dilawar later accused the CJP and Congress of attempting to "disrupt education and spoil the atmosphere". He added: "Turning the schools into political battlegrounds is extremely regrettable."

The People's Union for Civil Liberties-Rajasthan demanded the arrest of those accused of attacking the CJP delegation.

After Congress protest, FIR
filed over use of pellet gun

Shrimansi Kaushik
NEW DELHI

Following a seven-hour *dharna* (sit-in) by the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, outside the office of New Delhi's Deputy Commissioner of Police, police registered an FIR against the use of pellet guns on protesters during the July 20 march to Parliament.

Mr. Gandhi held the *dharna* after Sahil Lochab, a 19-year-old who lost vision in one eye after being hit by pellets during the protest, said the police had refused to register an FIR on his complaint.

The Congress leader, accompanied by his sister and Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and other senior Congress leaders, ended the sit-in after the police relented.

Mr. Lochab said he had written a seven-page complaint as soon as he was discharged from the hospital and went to various police stations. "But the police did not acknowledge my complaint. I have been trying to get an FIR registered first at Connaught Place, then at Mandir Marg, Sansad Marg and even the Crime Branch but to no avail," he said.

A student of the School of Open Learning at the University of Delhi, Mr. Lochab had said in his complaint that he received multiple pellet injuries on his chest, back, arms, and face.

He was seriously injured in his right eye; pellets had entered his body, and several of them could not be taken out. "Doctors have



Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi protest inside Parliament Street Police Station in New Delhi on Friday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

told me that the possibility of my eyesight coming back is less than one per cent," he wrote.

The FIR was registered in the evening under Sections 118(1) (voluntarily causing hurt using dangerous weapons) and 125 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. On Friday, Mr. Gandhi accompanied Mr. Lochab and his mother first to the Mandir Marg police station and then to the Sansad Marg police station.

"Sahil and his family have been moving pillar to post to get his complaint registered. Why is the police refusing to do so?" he told presspersons outside the DCP's office.

Contradicting versions

"It took them so long to register the FIR. It has been a month since the march when he received his injuries. Even after multiple visits, the police refused to receive the complaint. Who was holding it back? The final order has come from the Union Home Ministry. We all know now that even for an FIR to be registered, the Home Minister has to give an order," Mr. Gandhi said.

Senior Congress leader

Salman Khursid said that with the registration of the FIR, which mentions the use of pellet guns, "it is now documented that the police used pellets on July 20, contrary to the police's denial earlier."

The Hindu had reported that an entry in the general diary of Delhi's Sansad Marg police station recorded the use of pellet guns by the Rapid Action Force (RAF), contradicting the Delhi Police's initial denial on use of pellet guns against protesters.

The entry records the firing of two rounds from an anti-riot gun on the orders of a Delhi Police officer of DCP rank while a subsequent CRPF inquiry reportedly found that an RAF personnel fired seven pellet rounds, five of which struck protesters.

The reported use of pellets has raised questions over the police's crowd-control protocols and the circumstances in which force was deployed against demonstrators. On Thursday, the Supreme Court constituted a five-member High-Powered Enquiry Committee to conduct an independent inquiry into the police action.

SC lauds repealed MGNREGA as
'neither freebie nor exploitation'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday praised the repealed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), calling it a "salutary scheme" that was neither a freebie nor an exploitation of rural workers.

The court's accolade came amid claims by civil rights groups that MGNREGA's successor, the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) or the VB-G RAM G Act, has seen a 50% decline in employment generation, despite an increase in guaranteed work days from 100 to 125 per household annually.

The new law reflects a shift from a demand-driven, rights-based framework to a centrally controlled model. Also, the funding burden on States has increased three-fold, shifting from a 90:10 ratio to 60:40. The "MGNREGA was a good, effective scheme. It did a wonderful job in rural areas and was



Right to work: People employed under the MGNREGA scheme dig a trench in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

implemented pan-India. It was neither a freebie nor exploitation," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, orally observed.

Compensation sought

The Bench was hearing a petition filed by activist Aruna Roy seeking directions for the government to pay delayed wages under the MGNREGA, along with compensation.

Advocates Prashant Bhushan, Cheryl D'Souza and Neha Rathi, appearing for Ms. Roy, urged the court to examine whether

a law could prescribe minimum wages lower than the threshold determined by the State concerned.

The petition also sought to elevate the statutory guarantee of rural work to the status of a fundamental right under Article 21 (right to life) of the Constitution.

"The Constitution does not make the right to work a fundamental right. It is more a democratic aspiration under Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy)... To achieve that aspiration, the state formulates the policy by which work is provided at a grad-

ed, compensatory level. Should we treat it on par with Article 21?" Justice Joymalya Bagchi asked Mr. Bhushan. Mr. Bhushan said the right to lead a dignified life is part of Article 21.

"A dignified life requires you to get employment at minimum wages. Anything below minimum wages is forced labour," he submitted. Justice Bagchi said a minimum wage threshold might risk shrinking employment opportunities, while Chief Justice Kant noted that wages were usually linked to prevalent local conditions.

Justice V. Mohana stated that the issues raised by Mr. Bhushan must be examined afresh in light of the new law, rather than under the MGNREGA.

Mr. Bhushan submitted that States were required to provide nearly half the funds under the new law. "The number of employments has come down by half. States have no money," he said. The court asked him to file a new petition while disposing of the current one.

Nripendra Misra was key authority
on Ram Temple construction: Rai

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Former Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust (SRJTKT) general secretary and senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Champat Rai, in an article released on August 18, said Ram Temple construction committee chairman Nripendra Misra exercised near-complete control over the temple's construction and "considered himself the principal authority on all decisions".

In the nine-page Hindi article, shared in the VHP media group, he claimed that no work on the Ram Temple was undertaken without Mr. Misra's approval and that decisions taken without his involvement were rejected.

"Shri Nripendra Misra brought several people of his choice into the temple construction committee to assist him. One of them visited Ayodhya only once or twice during the previous six years, while another was consulted on security-related matters. A third

member, Shri Anoop Mittal, former chairman of NBCC, regularly attended the committee meetings," Mr. Rai wrote.

The decision maker

Mr. Rai also credited Mr. Misra with playing a key role in overcoming hurdles during the project.

"Whenever any obstacle came, he immediately requested the most capable persons in the concerned field and called them to Ayodhya," he wrote.

"Every decision was taken by this committee. No work was undertaken without this committee's decision... and even decisions taken outside it were not accepted. Shri Nripendra Misra always considered himself the principal authority for all decisions concerning temple construction," he wrote.

Following the Supreme Court's verdict on the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute, the Union government constituted the SRJTKT with 15 trustees.

Mr. Rai said Mr. Misra was subsequently appoint-



Champat Rai

ed chairman of the committee overseeing temple construction and related activities.

The article also details the organisational and engineering arrangements for the project. Mr. Rai said Larsen & Toubro was selected as the construction agency and Tata Consulting Engineers was appointed as the project management consultant, both by Mr. Misra, who was informed about the vision of late VHP leader Ashok Singhal, considered the architect and key strategist of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.

"The temple architect,

Ahmedabad-based Shri Chandrakant Bhai Sompura, had been selected by the late Ashok Singhal in 1986 and was retained. For the construction of other buildings, Shri Nripendra Mishra selected Noida-based firm Design Associates, headed by Jai Kakadikar," the article said.

According to Mr. Rai, construction of the temple began in June 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and was completed and dedicated to society by June 2026. He attributed the achievement to Mr. Misra's efforts.

The article comes days after reports that Mr. Rai had received a clean chit from the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing alleged embezzlement of donations to the Ram temple. He stepped down as general secretary of the Trust in July following the controversy over alleged donation theft.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Misra said he had read the article and that there was "nothing negative or controversial" in it.



A. Revanth Reddy

Centre denies approval for Telangana CM's U.S. trip

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Centre has denied permission to Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy to visit the United States as part of his Telangana Rising initiative, prompting him to cut short his London tour and return to Hyderabad on August 23.

The Ministry of External Affairs, which had been approached by the State government for clearance for the Chief Minister's official visit to the U.K. and the U.S., approved only the U.K. leg of the tour.

The State government was informed of the decision after the delegation had already reached the U.K.

Reacting to the decision, Mr. Revanth Reddy said the objective of the U.S. visit was to bring some of the world's leading educational institutions to Telangana, in line with the objectives of the National Education Policy.

"I have always believed we should all think beyond politics and elections when it comes to nation building and the future of the youth," he said.

Sowcar Janaki, the versatile face of southern cinema, is no more

In her five-decade career, she effortlessly essayed a variety of roles; she started out as a drama artiste in All India Radio, and debuted in films *with Shavukaru* in 1950; she went on to captivate viewers with 450 films in Telugu, Tamil, and Kannada

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

Sowcar Janaki, known for her versatile roles in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada films, passed away in Chennai on Friday. She was 94.

'Sowcar' became part of her name when she made her film debut in *Shavukaru* (1950), a Telugu film directed by L.V. Prasad. In Tamil, her entry began with the film *Valayapathi* (1952). She went on to be associated with some of the finest songs and roles, displaying style, finesse, majesty, and a range of expressions, in her five-decade career. She even earned the title 'weeping face'. But she preferred to call herself a feminist.

Her first movie with Sivaji Ganesan was *Paavai Vilakku* (though the film *Pa-dikkatha Medhai* was released first).

A recipient of Padma Shri and Tamil Nadu's Kailaimamani awards, she acted with three Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu – M.G. Ramachandran, M. Karunanidhi and Jayalalithaa – and, in Telugu, with N.T. Rama Rao. She was one of the favourite actors of director K. Balachandrar.

She played a remarkable comic role as the pretend mother of Rajinikanth in *Thillu Mullu*.

The song "*Maalaipozhuthin Mayakkathile Naan Kanavu Kanden Thozhi*" from the film *Bhagyalaksh-*

mi always conjures up the image of Ms. Janaki, who played a widow in the film. Another film, *Babu*, starring Sivaji Ganesan in the lead role, featured Ms. Janaki prominently as Sridevi's mother. In a way, her life resembled that of the film's mother – rich-turned-poor.

Born Sankaramanchi Janaki in 1931 at Rajahmundry (now Rajamahendravaram) in Andhra Pradesh into a Brahmin family, she grew up in a household where her father, who had studied paper-making technology in England, valued education. English was the language spoken at home. The atmosphere was conservative, and watching films was taboo. Listening to the radio was her favourite pastime. She participated in dramas broadcast by the All India Radio and soon became an A-grade artiste because of her robust voice.

In an interview with actor Suhasini Maniratnam, she had recalled how Telugu film producer Nagi Reddi, captivated by her voice, offered her a role in a film. But her family was against it, and she was forced to marry at the age of 15 to prevent her from acting. She became a mother at 17. Ms. Janaki herself had spoken about the abject poverty she faced when she began her film career as a mother of two children. Her fortunes changed later.

Even though many fe-



1931-2026

male actors acted opposite Sivaji Ganesan, Ms. Janaki's acting in films such as *Puthiya Paravai*, *Uyarntha Manithan* and *Mahakavi Kalidas* measured up to the thespian's. Her songs, body language and dialogue delivery made fans sit up and take notice.

With her extraordinary hairstyle and Singapore-style costume, she would enter humming to the beats of bongos while Sivaji Ganesan lit a cigarette in *Puthiya Paravai*. Her expression in the song "*Paaritha Gnaabagam Illaiyo*" was stunning. Her role in tormenting Sivaji Ganesan throughout the film, particularly in the song "*Enge Nimmathi, Enge Nimmathi*", is another milestone.

Kannada milestones
In Kannada industry, she debuted with *Devakamika* (1953). Her long on-screen

association with thespian Dr. Rajkumar is one of the highlights of her remarkable film journey. She had featured in legendary filmmaker B.R. Panthulu's *Rathnagiriya Rahasya* (1957), an adventure film starring Uday Kumar.

"Janaki's English-speaking abilities stood out. She was also known for choosing progressive characters," said film historian K. Puttaswamy.

Ms. Janaki essayed prominent characters in the 1960s and 70s. Panthulu's *School Master*, an acclaimed social drama, is another noted work. Her next Kannada project was also a milestone movie. B.S. Ranga's *Mahishasura Mardini* (1959) is considered the first major pan-Indian movie. The movie, starring Dr. Rajkumar, Uday Kumar and Nara-simharaju, was dubbed into seven languages follow-

ing its immense popularity in Kannada. In her second stint in Kannada cinema, Ms. Janaki excelled as a character artiste. She played Rajkumar's mother in *Thayige Thakka Maga* (1978). Her final Kannada movie was *Pungi Daasa* (2013), starring comedian-turned-hero Komal Kumar.

Malayalam's 'Mariya'
One of Ms. Janaki's rare forays into Malayalam cinema was the memorable *Soorya Manasam* (1992). She played Mariya, the loving mother of Putturumees, an intellectually challenged man played by Mammootty. Even as Urumees bears the brunt of the ridicule of those around him, Mariya is one of the few who understands him fully. She was able to convincingly portray the mental strength of that character.

She has 450 films to her credit in five languages: Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam and Kannada.

Ms. Janaki was also part of the freedom movement during the freedom struggle in 1946-47, during which she worked closely with Durgabai Deshmukh. She recalled with great pride the privilege of having served Mahatma Gandhi as a young volunteer when he visited the Hindi Prachar Sabha in then Madras.

(With inputs from Vivek M.V., S.R. Praveen, and T. Appala Naidu)

T.N. lays out Vision 2031 with focus on renewable energy

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

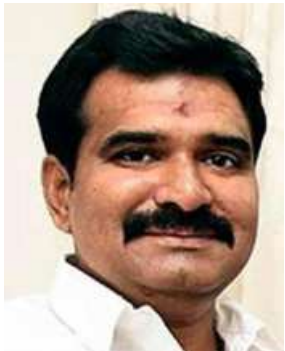
The Tamil Nadu Energy Department has announced Vision 2031 to achieve 50% renewable energy share in the State's energy mix by 2031. Expanding the electric vehicle charging infrastructure, enhancing rooftop solar support, and reducing aggregate technical and commercial losses to 10% are its key goals.

Energy Minister C.T.R. Nirmal Kumar, presenting the demands for the Energy Department for 2026-27 in the Assembly on Friday, announced several infrastructure projects.

He said the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPDC) planned to provide 50,000 new agriculture power connections this financial year. Among the other announcements was the proposal to establish 10 high-tension sub-stations at a cost of ₹110 crore and upgrade 10 33/11-kilovolt sub-stations. To improve power distribution in the city, the TNPDC will convert distribution transformers into ring main units.

A total of 1,250 distribution transformers would be converted into ring main units at a cost of ₹250 crore.

Under Vision 2031, the government would establish 20,000 electric vehicle-charging stations, with priority for corridors connecting major cities. As of April this year, the State



C.T.R. Nirmal Kumar

had recorded 5.50 lakh registered electric vehicles and 2,425 charging stations, indicating a rapid growth in electric vehicle adoption.

The Tamil Nadu Green Energy Corporation Limited (TNGECL) has conducted a feasibility study at 528 locations under PM E-DRIVE for the development of a State-wide electric vehicle charging network. It has also developed a portal to match Charge Point Operators (CPO) with landowners to establish public charging stations on a revenue-sharing basis.

To promote the charging infrastructure in apartment complexes, the Energy Department will provide a capital subsidy of 50%, with a ₹50,000 ceiling.

Smart meters
PFC Consulting Limited has been appointed as the implementing agency to fix 1.25 lakh smart meters in seven districts, including Chennai, Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur, Cuddalore, Villupuram, and Tiruvannamalai.

INBRIEF



T.N. to review construction material transport to Kerala

The Tamil Nadu government has assured Kerala that it will review the restrictions imposed on the transportation of construction materials, including rough stones and aggregates, to the State. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Joseph Vijay gave the assurance to Kerala Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan on the sidelines of the Southern Zonal Council meeting on Thursday. Tamil Nadu had earlier decided to regulate the transportation of construction materials to ensure adequate supplies within the State.

CBI seeks Governor's nod to prosecute Karnataka Minister

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is learnt to have recently sought sanction for prosecution from Karnataka Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot against Planning and Statistics Minister B. Nagendra, even as the Opposition BJP and JD(S) continued to disrupt legislature proceedings for the fifth consecutive day on Friday seeking ouster of the Minister. The Central probe agency, which investigated the Valmiki Corporation scam, has already filed chargesheets in three FIRs in which Mr. Nagendra has been named.

40 tribal workers rescued from bonded labour in A.P.

The Sri Sathya Sai district administration in Andhra Pradesh has busted an inter-State racket that allegedly trafficked impoverished tribal workers from Maharashtra to the district, confined them in charcoal kilns and subjected them to bonded labour. District task force teams conducted surprise raids and rescued 40 workers, including two minors, who were allegedly trafficked from Koshimbale village in Nizampur taluka of Maharashtra's Raigad district.

Labelled as 'illegal', West Bengal man faces ordeal in Bengaluru

Rishita Khanna
BENGALURU

Four days after the High Court of Karnataka held that the EPIC (voter card) issued to him following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in West Bengal was "genuine", Rafikul Biswas, 32, who had been framed as an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant living in Bengaluru, found himself in jail again when the Bengaluru City police launched "Operation Mukta", a drive against illegal immigrants.

While he got relief in a previous case of detention on August 4, he was again detained during Operation Mukta on August 8. "I consistently pleaded with the police, showing a copy of the High Court order

Despite holding an EPIC card issued during the recent SIR, the person was detained by police

that had quashed my case. It is better I die. I cannot live under this pressure and stress to prove that I am an Indian," he said. He was finally released after activists persuaded the police about the recent High Court order, the same day.

Originally from Nadia district in West Bengal and living in Bengaluru for the last 12 years with his wife and daughter, Mr. Rafikul says he has been targeted by the city police. The claims took shape after so-

meone made a Bangladeshi identity card in his name, claiming that he was a citizen of Bangladesh living in India. What followed was consistent harassment and pressure that he would be deported to Bangladesh, he recalled.

Within 11 months, Mr. Rafikul said the constant harassment and stress gave him two heart attacks. One occurred while he was in jail, following which he was released on medical grounds.

"Every time someone asks us where we are from, our fear cannot be described. Once you say West Bengal and if you're a Muslim, the instant reply is, 'Go to Bangladesh'. What does it take to prove that we are Indians?" he said.

ED conducts raids as part of Vivekananda Reddy murder probe

A.D. Rangarajan
KADAPA

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided the premises of several people associated with the Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy murder case in Pulivendula, Andhra Pradesh, on Friday. Similar raids were conducted in Hyderabad.

Simultaneous raids were carried out from morning at the premises of Devireddy Sivasankar Reddy, Yerra Gangi Reddy and Sunil Yadav, all of them named as accused in the murder case of former MP Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy.

The premises of Y.S. Bhaskar Reddy, father of Kadapa MP Y.S. Avinash

Reddy, were initially found locked, but officials summoned the relatives and got the house opened.

The searches are being carried out under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The case stems from the FIRs and chargesheets filed by the CBI in the murder investigation.

As per sources, the raids were said to be part of the ED's probe to ascertain alleged financial dealings and movement of funds in connection with the murder. The CBI's chargesheets alleged a contract killing of ₹40 crore, a claim that entered the record when the accused Shaik Dastagiri turned approver.

Witness in ex-MP Prajwal rape case alleges threat

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A witness in a rape case against former MP Prajwal Revanna has alleged that she was threatened by those supporting the accused, outside the court.

The Special Court of Sessions for criminal cases against former, present MPs and MLAs has asked the Special Investigation Team (SIT), led by Additional Director-General of Police B.K. Singh, to investigate the matter.

Sources said the witness told the court on Thursday, that supporters of the accused had made threatening calls to her after her previous deposition.

Malayalam staging on Emergency-era torture fuels debate on artistic freedom

Mini Muringatheri
THRISSUR

MISA, a play that recounts the custodial torture suffered by activist and artist Snehalatha Reddy during the Emergency, has sparked a major controversy following its recent staging at the DYFI State Conference in Thrissur, Kerala.

Critics have accused the production of obscenity, objecting to intense and realistic scenes and costume choices. The cast, cultural figures and DYFI leaders, however, have defended the play *MISA* (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) as a powerful portrayal of "state terror



The play recounts the custodial torture suffered by activist and artist Snehalatha Reddy during the Emergency. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and political repression". Staged by Chilanka Floating Theatre, Kozhikode, at the heart of the play is Snehalatha Reddy – actor, writer and activist who stood against the oppression during Emergen-

cy imposed in 1975.

"Those who look at only some scenes from the play through the lens of morality are trying to forget the severe persecution suffered by people during the Emergency," said DYFI

State secretary V.K. Sanoj. The police arrested Snehalatha on May 2, 1976, and detained her under the MISA. She spent eight months in Bangalore Central Jail, enduring harsh prison conditions and torture. Released on parole on January 15, 1977, Snehalatha died just five days later.

"The purpose of the play has been achieved. It has reached where it needed to go," Chinnoos Chilanka, who plays the central character, said.

"I will continue to come to the stage as Snehalatha Reddy, as Bilkis Bano and as others whose stories need to be told," she said.

India calls for global tech collaboration as BRICS meet begins

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Delivering the inaugural address at the 14th BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Ministerial Meeting in Chennai on Friday, Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said that emerging technologies are creating unprecedented opportunities for progress, and called for stronger international collaboration to ensure that innovation remains accessible, affordable, trusted and sustainable.

Dr. Singh said India had

chosen 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability' as the theme of its BRICS Presidency in 2026.

Dr. Singh said India remained committed to advancing an open, inclusive and human-centric approach to science and innovation. He referred to India's initiatives, including the National Quantum Mission, BioE3 Policy, National Geospatial Policy and the Digital Public Infrastructure ecosystem, which reflected an approach where innovation improves people's lives and economic conditions.

IndiGo plane grounded after tail-strike in Gorakhpur

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

An IndiGo Airbus A321's fuselage scraped the runway during landing at Gorakhpur earlier this week, according to industry sources, marking at least the 8th tail-strike incident involving the airline's A321 fleet.

The aircraft has remained grounded since the incident, which came to light in Gorakhpur on August 19. Its last recorded operation was a Delhi-Gorakhpur flight. The aircraft involved was an Airbus A321neo. According to industry sources, this is at least the 10th tail-strike incident involving an IndiGo aircraft since 2023, with at least eight of these incidents involving A321s. One incident involved the smaller-sized, regional aircraft, an ATR, and another an A320. There is no official data available on the number of tail-strike incidents involving the airline. The airline said the aircraft aborted a landing, and made a landing on second attempt on August 19 while arriving in Gorakhpur from Delhi. It was grounded after "scratches were found around the inlet of the auxiliary power unit (APU)", located at the rear of the aircraft.

Jharkhand HC stays govt. decision cancelling JSSC-CGL recruitment

Single Bench of Justice Deepak Roshan orders that the services of the personnel concerned be ensured; next hearing on Sept. 15; JPSC-JSSC Nyay Manch leader announces State-wide yatra; JMM workers and students clash in Ranchi and Giridih

Amit Bhelari
RANCHI

The Jharkhand High Court on Friday stayed the government notifications cancelling recruitment of personnel appointed through the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission-Combined Graduate Level (JSSC-CGL) examination and the appointments of Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs) in the State.

The single Bench of Justice Deepak Roshan stayed the Jharkhand government's decision to cancel the appointments and ordered that the services of the personnel and officials concerned be ensured. "It is made clear that the learned Advocate General is directed to inform the concerned department to allow the petitioners as well as others, who are similarly situated and affected by this notification, to continue their work till disposal of the writ application," the court order said. The court delivered the order while hearing petitions filed by affected persons.

The court order further said, "So far as the issue of interim protection is con-



Burning issue: Security personnel trying to stop the clash between members of the JPSC-JSSC Reforms Manch and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha workers in Ranchi on Friday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

cerned, this court feels that the interest of justice and balance of convenience is paramount and in the instant case, the balance of convenience is in favour of the petitioners; since, in effect, they have been terminated without following any due process of law. Further, operation of this notification is also against public interest."

The court on Thursday stayed the notifications cancelling the 11th and 13th Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) exams.

Amid a 25-day agitation over alleged recruitment irregularities, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led government on August 18 cancelled 22 exams and ordered a probe into 23 others conducted since 2014.

The next hearing on the matter is scheduled for September 15.

March for reforms

The JPSC-JSSC Nyay Manch faction led by Jharkhand Loktantrik Krantikari Morcha (JLKM) leader Devendra Nath Mahto an-

nounced the 'Bharti Sudhar Yatra' (Recruitment Reform March) starting from Nemra, the ancestral village of late 'Dishom Guru' Shibui Soren, one of the founding members of the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM). The yatra will be launched across all district headquarters of the State starting August 24. Through the march, students and the general public will be informed about recruitment examinations and the forum's demands.

Two vessels with 22 Indians on board hijacked by pirates

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Two commercial vessels carrying a total of 22 Indian nationals have been hijacked by armed pirates in separate incidents in Yemen and Somalia, a senior Shipping Ministry official said on Friday. The Indian crew members aboard both vessels are safe, as per the latest information.

The Eritrea-flagged oil products tanker, M.T. Sibul, carrying 20 crew members, including 16 Indians, was hijacked in the Gulf of Aden on August 20, about 30 nautical miles off the Yemeni coast, the official said.

A second vessel, the Cameroon-flagged M/V LUTUF, was hijacked on August 17 off Somalia's Puntland coast. The vessel has 10 crew members, including six Indians.

Maritime tracking information indicates that the tanker was approached by an unauthorised vessel before control of the ship was lost. The vessel was seized and subsequently taken toward Somalia's Nugaal coast, according to a Somali official cited by *The Associated Press*. The M/V LUTUF was carrying Turkish weapons and satellite

The Indian crew members aboard both vessels are safe, as per the latest information

equipment, destined for a Turkish military facility in Mogadishu.

The hijackers – eight armed men suspected of involvement in a previous hijacking – steered the ship toward Nugaal.

The renewed threat adds to security pressures already facing commercial shipping in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and wider Indian Ocean region, where vessels have had to contend with attacks linked to the conflict in Yemen.

The two hijackings also come as Indian seafarers face heightened security concerns elsewhere in the region, including the Strait of Hormuz, where tensions involving Iran, Israel and the U.S. have disrupted one of the world's key shipping corridors.

The 2026 BIMCO-ICS Seafarer Workforce Report estimates that India supplies 3,11,936 seafarers, underscoring the country's large exposure to risks affecting merchant crews worldwide.

Trade unions sound the alarm over Supreme Court judgment on the definition of industry

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Left-leaning trade unions have expressed concern over a nine-judge Bench judgment of the Supreme Court that said the definition of industry as per a 1978 judgment of the top court will not be applicable to the recently implemented Industrial Relations Code. They alleged that the latest judgment reflects "a structural tilt" towards managerial interests over the collective rights of workers.

"Justice Nagarathna rightly questioned the necessity of reopening a settled jurisprudence of nearly five decades, particularly when the Industrial Relations Code has already replaced the Industrial Disputes Act," said All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) general se-



Elamaram Kareem

cretary Amarjeet Kaur said. She said the AITUC is deeply concerned that the majority judges have left crucial questions to future litigation instead of confronting the implications of the exclusionary architecture of Section 2(p) of the Industrial Relations Code.

"The Code's exclusions relating to sovereign functions and charitable, social, or philanthropic institutions require strict and constitutionally compati-

ble interpretation. Governmental activity cannot automatically be equated with sovereign function, nor can the institutional label of a charitable organisation by itself erase the industrial character of the work performed by its employees," she said, adding that in an economy increasingly characterised by privatisation, shifting the focus from the substance of work to the institutional status of the employer can operate to the disadvantage of labour.

Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) general secretary Elamaram Kareem said that both the legislature and the judiciary failed to protect the rights of workers as mandated by the Constitution. Trade Union Centre of India (TUCI) president Fredy K. Thazhath said it has slashed labour protections.

Rashtrapati Bhavan withdraws email on Bangladesh PM visit

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

An email to the press by the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Friday briefly created the impression that the long-under-discussion visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman would take place soon. The email sent in the afternoon was headlined, "No change of guard ceremony this Saturday".

"The Change of Guard Ceremony at the Forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan will not take place this Saturday (August 22, 2026) due to the full rehearsal for the ceremonial welcome of the Prime Minister of Bangladesh," said the email that was issued in the name of Navika Gupta, deputy press secretary to the President of India. The email created the impression that a visit by Mr. Rahman is imminent. However,

The new note mentions there will be 'no change of guard ceremony this Saturday'

soon another release came from the Rashtrapati Bhavan negating the previous note saying, "Press release issued on the subject 'No change of guard ceremony this Saturday' which was issued on August 21, 2026 stands withdrawn."

The announcements added to the buzz around Mr. Rahman's New Delhi visit as the two sides had been in talks for a visit, though the plans reportedly ran into trouble after Bangladesh demanded that India create "propitious" circumstances for the visit by extraditing deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the suspected killers of radical student leader Osman Hadi.

Aspirations put on hold for Sahil Lochab, who lost vision in one eye after pellet injury

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

When Sahil Lochab, 19, left his home in Delhi's Najafgarh to take part in the student protests at Jantar Mantar last month, he told his mother that "it was important for his studies". He is an undergraduate student of Delhi University's School of Open Learning who wanted to become a police officer, and was preparing for competitive examinations.

One month later, his aspirations may be on hold.

Hit by metal pellets during the students' march to Parliament on July 20, Mr. Lochab has lost 99% of vision in his right eye. "He is able to perceive light from his right eye, but is unable to see anything else and this is impacting his studies too," his uncle Ajay said on Friday.



Sahil Lochab was hit by metal pellets during CJP protests.

His family had been struggling to get an FIR registered against the police for firing pellet guns during the march. On Friday, Rahul Gandhi visited the police station to support Mr. Lochab after which the FIR was registered.

Vocal about education

Mr. Lochab's friends and family say that his ideology was inspired by Bhagat

Singh. He had been taking part in the Cockroach Janta Party-led protest at Jantar Mantar even before the July 20 march. A friend said that his participation stemmed from his interest in education, which he has always been vocal about.

After his injury during the protest march, Mr. Lochab underwent surgery at the AIIMS Jai Prakash Narayan Apex Trauma Centre. Despite the police's initial denial, doctors confirmed to *The Hindu* that his injuries were caused by metal pellets. He sustained multiple pellet injuries on his face and upper body.

According to a general diary entry filed at the Parliament Street police station on July 22, the Rapid Action Force fired two rounds from an anti-riot gun on the directions of an officer of the Deputy Commissioner of Police.

48 teachers to be honoured by President on Sept. 5

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

President of India, Droupadi Murmu, will confer the National Teachers Awards on 48 school teachers at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on September 5. The purpose of the award is to celebrate the unique contribution of some of the finest teachers in the country, the Ministry of Education said in a statement.

This year, a total of 48 school teachers have been selected through a three-stage selection process at the district, State and national levels. The selected school teachers are from 27 States, seven Union Territories and six organisations of the central government.

A fresh protest at Jantar Mantar demands a complete overhaul of the reservation system

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Thousands of protesters gathered at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday under the banner of the Reservation Hatao Andolan (RHA), a Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)-style Instagram-page led mobilisation of anger against India's reservation policy. The protesters called for an overhaul of the reservation system, demanding that quota in public education and employment be solely based on income rather than socio-economic categories; raised demands such as "one family, one reservation"; and called for a roll back of UGC's caste-equity rules.

The movement began when a student, Harsh Du-



New demand: The crowd that gathered at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Friday to protest against caste-based reservation. ANI

bey, started the RHA Instagram page while the student movement being led by the CJP was demanding the resignation of former Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Soon after Mr. Pradhan's resignation, Mr. Dubey said he had handed over control of the page to veteran anti-re-

servation activists Anuradha Tiwari, Ajeet Bharti, and Neha Das.

Significantly, the RHA movement has flagged the concentration of quotas being availed by a small section of communities within each category of SC, ST, and OBC. This argument, which has led to

calls for introducing a creamy layer concept, is being used by the RHA movement to call for an overhaul of the system itself.

Stand-off with police

The protests came amidst the BJP-led Union government reiterating their stance that reservation for socio-economic categories such as SCs, STs, and OBCs is not a poverty alleviation scheme but a scheme meant to ensure representation for marginalised communities. Further, on Thursday, the Centre had told the Supreme Court that it was rethinking the 2026 UGC equity regulations.

On Friday morning, the protesters, many of whom were mobilised by organisations representing peo-

ple from "general" castes, such as Karni Sena and Ranbir Sena, arrived at Jantar Mantar despite the Delhi Police stating that no permission had been granted. However, the protesters refused to leave and had a stand-off with the security personnel. By evening, the protesters had set up a stage with a banner that read: "Reservation Reform Satyagraha". Around 7:30 p.m., the police announced that the gathering was illegal, and personnel could be seen putting protesters on buses and taking them away.

Mr. Dubey later posted on X that some protesters were marching towards Raj Ghat. He said they will return to Jantar Mantar if the police removed them from Raj Ghat as well.

SC trims law practice requirement to 1 year for judicial service

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday upheld its May 2025 judgment mandating legal practice to apply for entry into judicial service, but shortened the required experience from three years to one.

In a majority judgment of 2:1, Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice A.G. Masih said successful applicants with a year's legal practice under their belt could undergo a one-year intensive training at the State judicial academy concerned. This would be followed by a final year of law clerkship with senior judicial officers and High Court judges. The judgment came in lieu of the review petitions filed

against the 2025 verdict.

The majority opinion, authored by Chief Justice Kant, noted that a year has already passed since the May 2025 judgment. Candidates who had applied for the post of Civil Judge (Junior Division) in the interregnum would be 'deemed' to have completed the required one year of active legal practice. They would not be asked to furnish 'certificates of proof of practice'. But the rule of one-year prior legal practice would come into force in earnest from April 1, 2027.

Justice Vinod Chandran dissented with the majority view. "Experience at the Bar is essential for students right out of college," Justice Chandran observed.

Ethanol blending policy is behind rise in sugar prices, says Opposition

Sugar prices went up from ₹48 to ₹67 a kg over last three months, says Congress, blaming the diversion of sugar cane for fuel; asks why petrol prices were not reduced despite falling global crude rates; Kejriwal says government run by 'illiterates'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The diversion of sugar cane and food-grains for ethanol production is driving food prices higher, the Congress said on Friday, adding that vehicles not designed for 20% ethanol-blended fuel face mileage and compatibility problems. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) too claimed that diverting sugar cane towards ethanol production has reduced sugar output, pushing sugar prices up by ₹20 per kg in just 17 days.

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre had, on Thursday, allowed duty-free imports of 10 lakh tonne of raw sugar under a Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) till October 31, amid the rising prices of the sweetener in



As more sugarcane is diverted towards ethanol, domestic sugar prices have surged nearly 20% in August to a record ₹5,350 per 100 kg. India is now considering importing sugar for the first time in nearly a decade to meet domestic demand during the festival season



SYED NASEER HUSSAIN
Congress MP

local markets. The move is aimed at enhancing domestic availability and capping price rise.

Immediate review

In a post on X, Congress communications chief Jai-ran Ramesh demanded an immediate review of the E20 fuel policy and sought the provision of non-ethanol petrol options.

“The people are paying

the price for both expensive food and expensive travel because of the wrong decisions of the arrogant Modi government,” Mr. Ramesh said, adding that “a fuel policy under which both the vehicle and the kitchen become expensive” could not be acceptable to the country.

According to the figures cited by Mr. Ramesh, sugar prices have risen from ₹48

to ₹67 a kg and jaggery prices from ₹50 to ₹65 a kg over the past three months. Rice and maize flour, he said, have become costlier by 16% and 11%, respectively, while animal feed prices have risen 10.34%.

The Congress leader also asked why there was no cut in petrol prices despite a decline in international crude oil prices and lower costs resulting from 20% ethanol blending. He alleged that alternatives to petrol had been limited to benefit ethanol producers, while serious questions remained over the impact of E20-blended petrol on vehicle mileage and compatibility.

Food security

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Syed Naseer Hussain said the Modi government's ag-

gressive push for E20 was compromising India's food security. “As more sugarcane is diverted towards ethanol, domestic sugar prices have surged nearly 20% in August to a record ₹5,350 per 100 kg. India is now considering importing sugar for the first time in nearly a decade to meet domestic demand during the festival season,” he said in a post on X.

AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal said in a video message that the government started making ethanol from sugarcane in order to save foreign exchange spent on oil imports. “Now, they will import sugar using that foreign exchange,” he said. “It's a government entirely run by illiterates. No one knows what will happen if they do something,” he added.

Crop damage, production dip, and festival demand led to price hike, says govt.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

As 18 States and Union Territories witnessed an increase of ₹10 to ₹18 for a kilogram of sugar within one year, the Union government said on Friday that it was closely monitoring the situation and had taken steps to stabilise the prices.

On Friday, Odisha registered the highest price for sugar – ₹64.72 for a kilogram, which was ₹17.80 higher than in the same date of 2025, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Punjab.

Other than Odisha, consumers from Assam, Delhi, Goa, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Punjab, Tripura and West Bengal also paid over ₹60 for a kilogram of sugar on Friday. The national average price was ₹58.23.

Compared to the same date of last month, Madhya



18 States and U.T.s witnessed an increase of ₹10 to ₹18 for a kilogram of sugar in one year.

Pradesh witnessed an increase of ₹15.70 per kg, followed by Punjab, where the increase was ₹14.67 per kg. Compared to Friday of last week, Madhya Pradesh saw the sharpest increase of ₹11.82, followed by Odisha, rising by ₹10.67.

The Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution said in a statement that sugar prices had increased in recent weeks, from ₹48.18 per kg on July 20, to ₹55.70 per kg on August 20. “The go-

vernment has taken a series of measures to ensure adequate availability of sugar and stable prices for consumers,” the statement said, and maintained that rise in sugar prices could not be attributed to ethanol. “It is incorrect to attribute the recent increase in sugar prices to diversion of sugar for ethanol production. In fact, the share of sugar diverted for ethanol has declined from around 12% in 2022-23 to around 9% in 2025-26,” the statement added.

The government added that the present increase in sugar prices was due to a combination of factors, including lower-than-expected domestic production, increased demand ahead of the festive season, weather-related damage to the sugarcane crop, tightening global sugar supplies and hoarding by some sections of the industry.

Bihar Minister’s remark on sugar draws criticism from Opposition

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

A Bihar Cabinet Minister has gone viral on social media with his comments on rising sugar prices across the country. Bihar Rural Development Department Minister Shrawan Kumar, an MLA of the Janata Dal (United) told presspersons on Friday that “everyone has diabetes these days, so sugar price rise will not matter much”, a remark that raised eyebrows.

“Due to increasing cases of diabetic patients, people

are not taking sweets. Everyone is suffering from diabetes. I don't think the price rise of sugar will make much difference for people...they take very less sweets these days,” Mr. Kumar, who also holds the Information and Public Relations portfolio in the BJP-led NDA government told presspersons in his Assembly constituency of Nalanda.

The Minister's comment invited criticism from Opposition parties, including the Rashtriya Janata Dal. “Shrawan Kumar is a Minis-

ter and he can afford the rising price of sugar and remain insensitive to the concerns of common people...the hike in price of sugar has happened because of the wrong policy of the Central government,” said party spokesperson Ejaz Ahmad.

He said that the rising sugar price has “hit common people who start their day with a cup of tea”.

Independent MP from Purnea Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav also slammed Mr. Kumar for his comments.

Rahul’s sit-in is cheap politics, meant to divert attention from row over Vande Mataram: BJP

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday alleged that Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi attempted to divert public attention by holding a sit-in at the Parliament Street police station after getting cornered over the *Vande Mataram* issue.

Mr. Gandhi staged a dharna at the police station, demanding the registration of a case in connection with pellet injuries sustained by 19-year-old

Sahil Lochab during the Cockroach Janta Party-led protest in Jantar Mantar.

Union Minister J.P. Nad-da described the move as “cheap and diversionary politics”, saying that “Rahul Gandhi *ji*’s protest today is neither for students nor for justice; it is a symbol of the Congress party's political desperation and Rahul Gandhi's insatiable hunger for ‘footage’.”

Judicial matter

The BJP leader said the Supreme Court has already taken cognisance of the Ju-

Union Minister Nadda says dharna at a police station shows Cong. leader's 'hunger for footage'

ly 20 incident and constituted a five-member high-powered committee. “When the country's highest court is investigating the matter, what does Rahul Gandhi seek to prove by sitting outside a police station in front of the cameras? Has the Leader of Opposition lost faith in the

country's judiciary?” he asked.

He said the police informed Mr. Gandhi that the Crime Branch was already conducting an intensive probe into all the cases related to July 20 protest and assured him that the incident flagged by him was also being referred to the Crime Branch. “Despite this clarification from the administration, sitting on a protest demonstrates Rahul Gandhi's obstinacy and exposes the Congress party's desperation,” said Mr. Nadda.

Questioning the timing of the sit-in, he said the Congress was cornered across the country over the issue of *Vande Mataram* and people were demanding answers from the party over the “insult to the National Song”.

Former Union Minister and BJP MP Ravi Shankar Prasad criticised Mr. Gandhi for staging a dharna without permission. He said the Congress was indulging in “the politics of anarchy to divert attention after being cornered on the issue of *Vande Mataram*”.

Cong. view on National Song a very serious issue: Rajnath

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday criticised the Congress over its stand on *Vande Mataram*.

The Congress Working Committee, citing its 1937 resolution, had decided to sing only two stanzas (of the total six) of the National Song at party events.

“The Congress formally refusing to respect *Vande Mataram* is extremely unfortunate and, from a constitutional perspective, a very serious matter,” Mr. Singh said.

Stating that Parliament is the supreme institution of the country, he said any law passed by it is binding on every individual. “If anyone refuses to abide by it, then certainly their allegiance to the Constitution comes under a cloud of suspicion, and if anyone refuses to respect the National Song, then their patriotism too comes under a question mark,” he said.

He said the 1937 CWC resolution was passed by bowing before the “extremist demands of the Muslim League”. The country had to suffer its consequences in the form of Partition, he said. “Compromising before extremist elements has always proved disastrous for the country, and today, when the Congress is surrendering to extremist elements in the same manner, it is a sign of a serious threat to the future,” Mr. Singh said.



Union Minister Amit Shah being felicitated during the foundation stone laying ceremony for several projects in Siliguri on Friday. ANI

Decision on Vande Mataram historic, says Home Minister

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said it was “unfortunate” that even after Independence, *Vande Mataram* was not accepted “wholeheartedly” in the country. He hailed the 80th Independence Day celebration at the Red Fort as a “unique occasion” that included the full rendition of the National Song.

“Through this single song, this single literary creation, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee established that independent India must move forward by embracing cultural nationalism. It is unfortunate that even after Independence and the Partition of the country, *Vande Mataram* was never wholeheartedly embraced,” the Home Minister said, addressing a gathering in West Bengal's Siliguri.

His remarks came amid the Congress party's re-

cent announcement to feature only the first two stanzas of the National Song at party functions, a move which Mr. Shah has described as “anti-national”.

The Home Minister termed the enhancement of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026, a “historic decision”.

In Siliguri, the Minister inaugurated exhibitions with information on the three criminal laws.

Mr. Shah said implementing the three criminal laws in West Bengal was a “decisive” step towards “replacing the environment of fear with that of trust”.

Mr. Shah, who visited the headquarters of the Sashastra Seema Bal in Siliguri, inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for several projects and reiterated his government's resolve to curb infiltration from across the international border.

Rahul Gandhi’s politics on the streets signals a new Opposition playbook

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

A month after his sudden dharna outside the Prime Minister's residence over students' protests, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's unannounced protest outside the Parliament Street police station to get an FIR registered on a complaint by young pellet-gun victim Sahil Lochab reveals a new political strategy.

For the second time in a month, the Opposition leader not only caught the authorities by surprise but also his own party colleagues. The element of surprise, combined with direct action and sustained engagement, suggests that Mr. Gandhi is willing to experiment with a new political playbook.

The Congress's escalation came a day after Union Home Minister Amit Shah sharpened his attack on the party over its decision to sing only two stanzas of *Vande Mataram*, describing the move as “anti-national”.

Mr. Gandhi, however, sought to shift the political focus from the nationalism debate to the use of pellet guns against protesting students and, crucially, to the role of the Ministry of Home Affairs, which Mr. Shah heads.



Rahul Gandhi

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha appears to be seeking a form of consistency in his political actions

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal both sought to frame the registration of the FIR as a consequence of Mr. Gandhi's intervention.

“Those shedding crocodile tears over nationalism are, in reality, the biggest enemies of the country's youth!” Mr. Kharge said in a post on X. “Sahil is not alone,” he added.

Mr. Venugopal said basic constitutional rights were being granted as “favours” only after massive pressure was applied. “They have bent. They were forced to bend,” he said in an online post, claiming that the Delhi Police was compelled to register the FIR after Mr. Gandhi protested for hours demanding action over Mr. Lochab's pellet injuries.



Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Permanent Under Secretary for Defence of U.K. Jeremy Pocklington in New Delhi. PTI

India, U.K. review bilateral defence ties at DCG meeting

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and the Permanent Under Secretary for Defence of the United Kingdom, Jeremy Pocklington, on Friday co-chaired the 25th India-U.K. Defence Consultative Group Meeting (DCG) in New Delhi, reviewing bilateral defence cooperation with a focus on defence industry and research and development.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the two sides reviewed ongoing defence industrial cooperation, with particular emphasis on research and development under the India-U.K. Vision 2035 and the 10-year Defence Industrial Road map.

Maritime security

India and the U.K. also agreed to expand exchanges between their armed forces through joint exer-

cises, training and capacity building initiatives.

They acknowledged the robust maritime security cooperation between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific, including the establishment of the Regional Maritime Security Centre of Excellence under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.

The two sides exchanged views on regional peace and security and reaffirmed their commitment to mutual security and strategic autonomy.

They reiterated that the India-U.K. Strategic Partnership is anchored in shared values of peace, stability, freedom and mutual respect. The meeting marked Mr. Pocklington's first visit to India in his new capacity. During his visit, he laid a wreath at the National War Memorial and paid homage to soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation.



Saving faces

Use of facial recognition equipment at protest sites is worrisome

India appears to be normalising the technical ability to subject political gatherings to searchable biometric surveillance without first having settled, through legislation and judicial oversight, the circumstances in which the state may lawfully do so. While the Delhi Police have continued to deny the use of excessive force and manhandling people involved in the Cockroach Janta Party protests, contrary to protestors’ testimonies, facial recognition equipment was present at the protest site while the demonstrations were on. According to its affidavit to the Supreme Court of India, the police deployed a facial recognition system (including Artificial Intelligence-enabled cameras to scan faces in real-time against a database), a mobile surveillance van and a command and control vehicle, smart spectacles for identifying individuals on the move, and drones and videographers; the van and the spectacles have been tied to private contractors. The police have also not addressed whether actual biometric processing occurred with every individual within the range of cameras. Even if the police discarded the images associated with infructuous checks, that the data may have been accessible to private contractors, whose terms of engagement are unclear, is worrisome. However, no statute governs the use of facial recognition systems; the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, whose data-processing obligations are not yet in force, still makes broad exemptions for state agencies. The Automated Facial Recognition System of the National Crime Records Bureau can be used to identify criminals, unidentified bodies, and so on, and the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act 2022 expanded the set of records that the police may collect from specified persons. However, these actions are still only allowed *vis-à-vis* specific groups of people.

Irrespective of the constitutional validity of the police’s actions, the chilling effect on potential participants may also curtail the right to protest. The state has to pass a well-established proportionality test when interfering with the right to privacy. While the first question – the existence of a legitimate objective – already poses important challenges to facial recognition en masse, the technology is indiscriminate at the point of capture. After all, there is a less restrictive but equally effective alternative (e.g., conventional policing). At this time, far too many questions are unanswered – including over the data-processing agreements, access, legal provisions that authorised major decisions, and the expected rate of false positives – for the use of facial recognition with all protesters to be justified.

Noise annoys

India must enforce noise pollution regulations uniformly and consistently

In a February 2025 hearing in the matter of *Surendra Prasad vs State of Bihar*, the Patna High Court acknowledged DJ trolleys and loudspeakers to be a major source of noise in Patna. After criticising the Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) for failing to curb the menace, Justice Rajiv Roy directed the BSPCB to obtain reports from the police about permissions granted to operators of these noise sources and the action taken. In October, the police said they had seized equipment, levied fines, and so on over three months in Patna, Barh, and Fatuha but had taken no action in Masaurhi, a picture Justice Roy called “unbelievable” for suggesting that there were no noise violations there. In the course of these hearings, Justice Roy also summoned police officers and upbraided boilerplate affidavits, among others. The High Court’s August 14 order was a continuation of this escalation, culminating – for now – in Statewide directives on the emission of high-decibel noise. Effectively, the High Court’s actions illustrate how dismal enforcement has become despite the existence of comprehensive laws. Courts have repeatedly said that people have a right under Article 21 to be protected from unlawful noise. Today, with episodic enforcement having become endemic, the Patna High Court becoming a quasi-regulator is, at least as a stopgap measure, creditable.

It is absurd to expect the public to complain about every DJ or horn before the police can respond. The High Court’s directions to the authorities to pursue routine rather than complaints-based enforcement and to have DJs, sound-system operators, and event halls register themselves with the subdivisional authorities are the sort of proactive enforcement that regulating noise pollution in particular warrants. In fact, the High Court’s order also touched on a practical, everyday understanding of how loud-noise violations occur when it directed loudspeakers to stop playing at 9.55 p.m., five minutes before the law’s 10 p.m. cut-off, effectively allowing time for operators to wind up rather than permit the deceptively innocuous practice of carrying on past 10 p.m. because “it is just a few minutes”. Loud noise is often produced by ordinary social events such as festivals, weddings, political campaigns, and religious events, and enforcing rules creates friction with people who believe they have a right to practise their culture as they deem fit. Also, governments have an incentive to tolerate, rather than antagonise, their constituents. At the same time, having operators register themselves so that officials can regulate all of them equally rather than sporadically can also eliminate selective interventions. In the final analysis, the success of the High Court’s latest order should be measured by whether the State develops a consistent habit of enforcement.

The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2025-26 report highlights notable progress in India’s school education system, covering 1.47 million schools, 240 million students, and 10.2 million teachers. Progress has been recorded in gross enrolment, student retention, dropout reduction, teacher availability, and educational infrastructure. However, the report also shows that regional and social disparities persist in access, resources, learning opportunities, and educational outcomes. Disparities in gross enrolment ratios (GER), dropout rates, pupil-teacher ratios, and infrastructure availability across regions and social groups indicate the ongoing challenge of guaranteeing equitable, inclusive, and quality education in India.

Regional and social imbalances

The report confirms that significant variations exist across socioeconomic groups and geographic regions in terms of various indicators. The distribution of enrolled students shows that Andhra Pradesh leads in Aadhaar seeding (99.6%), followed by Chandigarh (99%), while Meghalaya records the lowest rate (35%), compared with the national average of 90.2%. Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest share of schools and student enrolment, while Meghalaya and Himachal Pradesh have the lowest shares of schools relative to enrolment, indicating higher student-school ratios.

At the school level, West Bengal has recorded the highest proportion of foundational and preparatory schools (79%) of total, and among the lowest secondary schools (11%); Chandigarh has the highest secondary schools (83%) and the lowest foundational and preparatory schools (5%) of total. The social composition of enrolled students shows significant variation across regions. Chandigarh and Delhi have the highest proportions of General category students, while Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Ladakh have high proportions of Schedule Tribe (ST) enrolment. Punjab records one of the highest shares of Scheduled Caste (SC) enrolment, whereas Other Backward Classes representation is particularly high in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

At the national level, the GER has recorded highest for OBCs (49%), followed by General (27%), SCs (17%), and STs (10%). Thus, GER indicates large differences in school education enrolment in comparison to their corresponding population of each social group.

The Gender Parity Index across all school levels shows higher girls’ enrolment and participation than boys across most of the States/Union Territories. The UDISE+ data show that students from minority communities account for more than 20% of enrolment, with



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India’s educational progress needs stronger focus on equity, inclusion, accessibility, and quality

Muslims and Parsis among the major minority groups. The average enrolment per school shows that Chandigarh registers the highest average enrolment per school (1,194), followed by Delhi (788); while Ladakh records the lowest average enrolment (64), indicating variation in the size of the schools across the country.

The pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) is an important factor influencing students’ performance and achievement. The PTR varies highly, registering lowest in Union Territories and highest in densely populated States. A significant inter-State variation in PTR exists across pedagogical stages; i.e., foundational, preparatory, and middle PTRs are generally lower than secondary across most of the States. Jharkhand records the highest Secondary PTR (43), followed by Uttar Pradesh, signifying a heavy workload on teachers. On the other hand, Sikkim has the lowest secondary PTR (6), followed by Ladakh. The GER varies significantly at the levels of schools and regions across the country. Meghalaya records the highest Foundational GER (131), followed by Mizoram, while Bihar has the lowest GER (24), preceded by Uttar Pradesh. Meghalaya again records the highest Preparatory GER (171), followed by Manipur; whereas Gujarat has the lowest GER (74), preceded by Bihar. Chandigarh and Meghalaya record the highest Middle GER (118), followed by Delhi. On the contrary, Bihar has the lowest GER (70), preceded by Nagaland. Similarly, Chandigarh registers the highest Secondary GER (109), followed by Goa; while Bihar has the lowest GER (48), preceded by Nagaland.

The dropout rate determines the attainment and transition rate to the next stage of schools. Bihar accounts for the highest preparatory dropout rate (7.9%), followed by Meghalaya. On the other hand, many States/Union Territories such as Delhi, Haryana and Maharashtra do not report dropout. Similarly, Bihar records the highest middle-level dropout rate (9%), followed by Uttar Pradesh. While several States/Union Territories such as Chandigarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh do not register dropouts at this stage, Ladakh records the highest secondary dropout rate (14.8%), followed by Karnataka. West Bengal has the lowest dropout rate (1.5%), preceded by Telangana.

Persistent gaps

Generally, access to schooling has improved significantly over the years. Most children now have a school at a suitable distance, but regional differences continue. Remotely located places, hilly, tribal and border areas still have limited schools and transport facilities, where school-going children face greater difficulties in attending school regularly, such as in Bageshwar district of Uttarakhand, Ganjam and Kandhamal districts of Odisha, Kathua district of Jammu and

Kashmir, and Palghar district of Maharashtra. Simultaneously, children from SCs, STs, minorities, and economically poor families have a greater likelihood to face different barriers that limit their enrolment, attendance, and completion of schooling.

School infrastructure has improved in several areas of the country, i.e., access to drinking water and electricity. However, the availability of infrastructure varies regionally across the country. Educationally backward districts are still struggling to provide a learning environment in rural schools in comparison to urban areas.

Teacher availability is a factor that significantly influences educational outcomes. The report shows that many States have recruited qualified teachers, while teacher shortages continue in several regions. Rural and remote schools often face a shortage of teachers performing multiple classes and subjects and many other non-teaching responsibilities allotted by the government. High student-teacher ratios reduce the individual attention students receive and adversely affect the learning process. Despite progress in girls’ schooling, challenges persist in reducing dropout rates, enhancing transition from primary to secondary education, and providing sufficient and suitable facilities for disabled children. Inclusive infrastructure, accessible classrooms, and supportive teaching practices are essential for equitable education.

Targeted investment will help

The UDISE+ 2025-26 report shows that educational inequality persists across accessibility, infrastructure, teacher availability, digital resources, and social inclusion. Addressing these dimensions collectively is essential for equitable educational development. In line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, targeted investment in educationally deprived regions, improved digital infrastructure, adequate teacher deployment, and stronger support for disadvantaged groups can help bridge persistent gaps.

Regional and social imbalances continue to influence educational opportunities and learning conditions. Reducing these disparities requires a balanced approach that collectively improves infrastructure, promotes equitable teacher deployment, strengthens inclusive social and economic policies, and provides dedicated support for disadvantaged social groups. A regionally and socially balanced approach that integrates educational quality, equity, and accessibility will help create a more inclusive education system, address the paradox of progress in India’s evolving school education landscape, and contribute to the country’s long-term social, economic, and regional development.

Unimpeded trade needs IPMDA as the answer



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Despite the diplomatic difficulties in United States-India relations due to mounting sanctions, it is increasingly clear that Washington needs regional powers such as New Delhi to support common global interests and values. Amid the U.S. visa issues for Indians and the energy crisis stemming from the war in West Asia, Indian and U.S. Foreign and Commerce Ministers have underscored the need for reciprocal trade and energy agreements. While the prime objectives in the present relations are clear, the strategy needs renewed focus on maritime domain awareness (MDA), which is crucial for the ‘unimpeded trade’ and has been unequivocally agreed to by both sides.

The Indo-Pacific is a trade artery

The West Asia crisis has demonstrated that the Indo-Pacific is not only a crucial geostrategic location for India and the U.S. but also for the rest of the world. Geoeconomically, it is the circulatory system of the global economy, a vast maritime corridor through which nearly \$7 trillion in trade flows annually, connecting energy producers in the Persian Gulf to manufacturing hubs in East Asia and consumer markets across the Americas. Some of the world’s busiest maritime chokepoints, the Straits of Malacca, the Lombok, and the Sunda, Hormuz, Bab-al-Mandeb, and Mozambique channels sit squarely within its waters, crucial for both energy and container supplies. Yet, this indispensable artery of global commerce is increasingly being threatened by a convergence of state-sponsored coercion, illegal maritime activity, and a dangerous surveillance gap – geographically, jurisdictionally and institutionally – that even the U.S. is finding challenging to address alone.

The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) launched under the Quad framework in 2022, represents the most credible multilateral architecture yet devised to address this problem. It is a practical, technology-based mechanism for sharing near-real-time maritime data across partner nations to detect, deter, and respond to threats to the free flow of trade. And its full

Maritime cooperation through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) can strengthen the Indo-Pacific’s trading system

operationalisation is anchored in robust U.S.-India cooperation under Quad (India, Australia, Japan, the U.S.), which is now a strategic imperative. At the technological level, in 2025, India has already purchased SeaVision technology from the U.S., which includes software enhancements, training, and logistical support necessary for mutual MDA cooperation.

A surveillance deficit

The Indo-Pacific suffers from a persistent and widening maritime surveillance deficit. As a multilayered technological assimilation, MDA provides an effective understanding of the maritime domain and its impacts on security, safety, the economy, and the environment.

Across the broader waters of the Indian Ocean, which connect to the South China Sea and the Western Pacific, hundreds of vessels routinely disable their Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponders – a phenomenon analysts call “going dark” – likely to evade sanctions, conceal cargo, and cause safety and environmental threats.

Such vessels may also be engaged in smuggling or ship-to-ship transfers of contraband. Many smaller fishing vessels fall outside mandatory AIS transponder carriage requirements, and depending on the applicable national and international regulatory framework, they are also found engaged in illegal fishing practices in other nations’ waters or even at high seas. This depletes regional stocks and undermines the food security of littoral states.

Furthermore, as witnessed in recent times, non-state as well as state-affiliated actors are conducting grey-zone operations designed to intimidate and coerce, while escaping any legal or conventional military response. The Quad’s Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration 2026 (IPMSC), under the IPMDA architecture, is as elegant in its pragmatism as in its cooperation, based on a shared understanding that no country can monitor the vast oceans alone. By integrating data from commercial satellite-based radio-frequency monitoring, radar fusion, and existing partner-nation sensor networks, and

sharing it with like-minded partners, it creates a layered, near-continuous picture of maritime activities.

The beneficiaries

For the U.S., regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean is essential if it aims to focus on its immediate neighbourhood in the Pacific and the Atlantic. For India, its Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), established in Gurugram in 2018, is a natural institutional complement to IPMDA’s regional hub architecture. IPMDA is precisely the kind of arrangement that respects India’s sovereignty while amplifying its reach. With the basics already in place, U.S.-India cooperation is necessary but not sufficient.

The full potential of IPMDA/IPMSC will be realised only through the active participation of existing Quad partners as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) partner states, the Pacific Island nations that constitute critical maritime corridors. The European Union, which has upheld the importance of free and open trade since the Hormuz crisis, signals an appetite for engagement that Washington and New Delhi must cultivate.

The contributions and benefits of IPMDA/IPMSC for smaller, capacity-constrained partners, such as Bangladesh, the Maldives, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and Fiji, are significant. These countries have independent surveillance infrastructure, but their waters are frequently exploited because these systems remain ineffective at addressing maritime crimes beyond their jurisdictions. This provides an opportunity for collaboration.

The strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific has systematically dismantled the assumption that open trade is unilaterally sustainable. The freedom of navigation upon which global supply chains depend is increasingly contested, and such contestation, un rebutted, has become precedent in recent years. In a region where coercion has increasingly become the currency of power, transparency must present itself as a form of deterrence.

Sowcar Janaki

The passing of veteran actor Sowcar Janaki has caused a deep shock and left an even greater vacuum in the world of acting. She left little unexplored in the art of acting and portraying diverse characters on the silver screen. Every scene

and every character she portrayed was a lesson and an example for those who aspired to pursue acting as a career.

S. Muthusubramaniyan, Coimbatore

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

GROUND ZERO



A farmer sits in his dry paddy field at Vilakudi near Thiruthuraiipoondi in Tiruvavur district of Tamil Nadu. R. VENGADESH

A dry spell along the Cauvery river

A weak monsoon has left farmers on both sides of the Cauvery struggling with dwindling water supplies. In Karnataka, farmers are worried about irrigation even as the State faces pressure to release water to Tamil Nadu, where large tracts of paddy fields remain barren. The competing demands have sharpened tensions between the two States. **Laiqh A. Khan** and **T. Ramakrishnan** report on the plight of farmers

Marilingaiah, a farmer from Karnataka’s Kuntanahalli village in Maddur taluk of Mandya district, has raised a nursery of paddy seedlings on his two-acre plot. He is waiting for water to reach his fields, which lie at the tail end of the Visvesvaraya irrigation canal system. The canal draws water from the Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) reservoir, located across the Cauvery river near Mysuru.

Worried, he says, “If water does not flow into the fields in the next 10 days, I will not only have to give up hopes of sowing paddy, but also lose the ₹8,000 I have spent on raising the nursery.”

Marilingaiah knows that adequate rainfall, along with canal water, is essential for the paddy to survive. Yet, he is among the many farmers in Karnataka’s Cauvery basin who have defied official advice against sowing water-intensive crops such as paddy and sugarcane this season, amid a predicted deficient monsoon and inadequate inflows into the basin’s reservoirs.

The optimism of the farmers was fuelled by a brief revival of the monsoon in the first week of August, when the water level in the 124.8-foot KRS reservoir rose from 93-94 ft to over 100 ft within a few days, before stagnating at 109 ft.

While farmers like Marilingaiah have chosen to trust nature instead of switching to semi-dry crops such as ragi, pulses, or oilseeds, others are waiting for a clearer picture to emerge. D.K. Ramu of Kodihalli village in Maddur taluk and Raju of Siddapura village in Srirangapatna taluk are among them. “If there is a promise of water in the next few days, I will sow paddy. Otherwise, I will grow ragi,” Ramu says. However, he notes that heavy rain could also damage the ragi crop.

Farmers across Karnataka’s Cauvery basin are facing not only the pressure of a deficient monsoon and uncertainty over the availability of irrigation water, but are also concerned about the need to share the limited Cauvery water with neighbouring Tamil Nadu – a vexed issue that goes back more than 130 years.

Meanwhile, in Tamil Nadu, farmers in the Cauvery delta are facing a water crisis of their own. Low storage at the Mettur dam, Karnataka’s failure to release a sufficient share of the water it received in June and July, and the Tamil Nadu government’s decision not to open the dam for irrigation on the customary date of June 12 have left large tracts of paddy fields barren. The State continues its legal battle with Karnataka to secure its share of the Cauvery water.

Balancing competing water needs

With the monsoon falling short and reservoir levels under pressure, Karnataka has had to balance irrigation needs with drinking water requirements and its obligations under the Cauvery water-sharing arrangement.

On August 19, the Cauvery Irrigation Advisory Committee, a regional body chaired by Karnataka Water Resources Minister N. Cheluvarayaswamy, met in Bengaluru and decided to release canal water in only four rotational cycles during the crop season, instead of continuously. This decision was taken to conserve reservoir storage and



If water does not flow into the fields in the next 7-10 days, I will not only have to give up hopes of sowing paddy, but also lose the ₹8,000 I have already spent on raising the nursery.

MARILINGAIAH
Farmer from Karnataka

to ensure water availability for other needs, including for drinking.

Devaraj, a farmer from Attahalli village near Mysuru, says the plan to release water for about 15 days and then stop it for the next 15 days will not provide enough water for paddy and sugarcane crops. “Farmers will be able to grow only dry crops,” he says.

The State is also under pressure from the Supreme Court and the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) to share the limited water with Tamil Nadu in what is shaping up to be a distress year. This central body was set up in June 2018 by the Union government to handle water-sharing from the Cauvery among Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry

On August 11, Karnataka appealed to the CWMA to immediately reduce water releases to Tamil Nadu from 12,000 cusecs (cubic feet per second) per day to 10,000, warning that there will be severe drinking water shortage if more water is released for crops in the Cauvery basin.

With water to be released under the rotational cycle only as long as reservoir levels permit, State Sugarcane Farmers’ Association president Kurub Shanthakumar questions whether the Karnataka government and its legal team were making a strong enough case for farmers and presenting the State’s position before the Cauvery water-sharing bodies – the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) and the CWMA – and the Supreme Court. He says the legal team does not appear to have succeeded in convincing the authorities about the water crisis in Karnataka.

Farmers in Maddur taluk are also bracing for a confrontation with the State government over the proposed diversion of KRS water to the Cauvery Stage VI drinking water project for Bengaluru, which requires an additional 6 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) of water annually. The Cauvery Stage VI drinking water project is a ₹6,939-crore infrastructure initiative approved by the Karnataka government this February to supply 500 MLD (million litres per day) of Cauvery water to roughly 30 lakh residents in Bengaluru as well as the adjoining towns of Bidadi, Hos-

kote, Anekal, Devanahalli, and Nelamangala.

“Is it fair for the government to starve us of water while diverting it to Bengaluru? Shouldn’t it identify other sources of drinking water for the city instead,” asks Mallesh, a Kuntanahalli resident, who is also a journalist.

A season of uncertainty

While farmers at the canal’s tail end bear the brunt of the distress, paddy transplantation is nearly complete in areas closer to the KRS reservoir, such as Karekura and Hosahalli. In a paddy field in Hosahalli, Cheluvuraju says most farmers in the region typically grow two crops a year given the usual availability of water. But his hopes for a second crop this year have dimmed as reserves have depleted. “We are not sure if we will be able to raise the second crop,” he says.

Cheluvuraju adds that he may have to work as a labourer to make ends meet if he is unable to grow the second crop. Most agricultural labourers in the region earn ₹400-500 for a day’s work from 7 a.m. to noon. The deficient monsoon has also cast a shadow over sugarcane fields. Farmers who have already harvested their crops are relieved, but many others are pinning their hopes on rain. Chikkalingaiah, a farmer from Chikkabyadarahalli in Pandavapura taluk, says his sugarcane crop needs another nine months before harvest – and without timely rain, it may not even be fit to use as cattle fodder.

Many farmers have taken not only interest-free short-term loans from primary agricultural co-operative credit societies, but also high-interest loans from microfinance companies. “If we are unable to grow crops, how will we repay our loans,” asks Nagesh, a resident of Chikkanahalli. He believes that the government should waive farmers’ agricultural loans and take steps to stop microfinance companies, notorious for deploying aggressive recovery agents, from harassing borrowers.

Though the despair among farmers over poor rainfall and the release of water to Tamil Nadu is reflected in the occasional protests, staged mostly by farmers’ organisations and pro-Kannada outfits across different parts of the Cauvery basin, these demonstrations, unlike in previous years, have remained muted. Even the Karnataka bandh, called by Kannada activist Vatal Nagaraj on August 13, drew a lukewarm response, barring parts of Maddur taluk.

Sunanda Jayaram, Organising Secretary of the Mandya District Raithara Hitharakashana Samithi, a farmers’ welfare committee, says with regret that farmers, the main stakeholders in the Cauvery water-sharing issue, were not responding to the calls for struggle.

An agriculturalist in Kuntanahalli, however, points to a different reason: ruling Congress leaders, he says, are actively discouraging farmers from taking to the streets, cautioning them against falling into what they call an “Opposition trap” – joining the protests only to later face the hassle of police stations and court appearances.

Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar has chastised activists for staging protests over the Cauvery issue “for the sake of publicity.” In particular, he warned them against wading into the river – a common form of protest – after the Water Resources Department issued a flood alert earlier this month over the release of water from the near-brimming Kabini reservoir.

While acknowledging that Karnataka’s dams were not yet full, Shivakumar vowed to protect the interests of the State’s farmers. But he has also emphasised the need to uphold the law by complying with directions on the release of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu.

Crisis in the Cauvery delta

“Very bad, very depressing situation” is how Thanga Jayaraman, an agriculturist from Tiruvavur, describes the situation in Tamil Nadu’s Cauvery delta, considered the rice bowl of the State.

“Ordinarily, when water is released from the Mettur dam (built in Salem district in Tamil Nadu

across the Cauvery) on June 12 for irrigation, it reaches our area, about 300 kilometres downstream, by June 23 or 24. But this year, nothing,” says Jayaraman, who taught English at several institutions of higher education before taking up farming after retirement.

A drive of over 200 km from Tiruchi through Thanjavur, Thiruvaiyaru, Tiruvavur, and Mannargudi shows largely barren paddy fields. “You should have come last year. You would have found greenery everywhere,” says A.T.B. Balamurugan, a farmer of Andaankarai, about 15 km from Thiruthuraiipoondi in Thiruvavur district.

Ordinarily, paddy is cultivated across 5.3 lakh acres in the Cauvery delta during the ongoing short-term Kuruvai season, followed by cultivation across 12.9 lakh acres during the longer Samba-Thaladi season, which begins with transplantation in late July or early August and ends with the harvest in mid-January. According to Tamil Nadu government data, the area under paddy cultivation this year has fallen to 4.5 lakh acres.

However, some agriculturists dispute the figure. They say there have been instances of stunted growth and crops showing signs of withering, making the official figure unreliable. The impact, they say, extends beyond the fields.

“Economic activity in the region is getting crippled because of the erosion of livelihood opportunities,” says P.R. Pandian, president of the Tamil Nadu All Farmers Organisations’ Coordination Committee and a resident of Mannargudi. “Shops and other businesses here down their shutters by 7 p.m.”

Located along the eastern coast of the State, the Cauvery delta, spanning districts such as Thanjavur, Tiruvavur, Mayiladuthurai, and Nagapattinam, is characterised by fertile alluvial soil and a tropical climate with the flow of the Cauvery. Its importance can be gauged from the fact that during the procurement year of 2025-26 (September 1, 2025 to July 31, 2026), the region contributed 39.5 lakh tonnes of paddy out of the State-wide procurement of 57.5 lakh tonnes.



Ordinarily, when water is released from the Mettur dam on June 12 for irrigation, it reaches our area by June 23 or 24. But this year, nothing.

THANGA JAYARAMAN
Agriculturist from Tiruvavur

Yet many parts of the zone remain economically backward with a majority of the population depending on agriculture for livelihood, despite climate challenges. Scheduled Castes, who live in large numbers in the region, constitute the dominant segment of landless agricultural labourers.

These are the reasons why successive Tamil Nadu governments have been keen to protect the interests of the Cauvery delta.

Opening the Mettur dam

This year, given the poor forecast for the south-west monsoon, attributed to super El Nino, the government chose not to open the Mettur dam on June 12. “The authorities should not release water from the dam until the water level reaches at least 100 ft,” says Pandian. The level is now about 85 ft, against the full capacity of 120 ft.

The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal and the Supreme Court have provided for greater share of the river water to be released by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu during the south-west monsoon (123.14 TMC out of the annual quota of 177.25 TMC). This share is mostly meant to support paddy cultivation during the Samba season.

The Samba crop is important not only for food security but is also the mainstay of the delta’s rural economy. Farmers also grow the shorter-duration Kuruvai crop, which can offer higher yields. This crop is largely dependent on groundwater, with farmers using energised pumpsets to irrigate their fields. But declining groundwater levels and salinity are making even this option increasingly difficult.

“My area is located between the Cauvery and one of its branches, the Coleroon (Kollidam). Even there, the water level is going down,” says R. Arivalagan, a farmer from Peramur, about 10 km from Thiruvaiyaru. Submersible pumpsets, once more common in the dry districts of Coimbatore and Dharmapuri, have become commonplace in the delta too. Over-extraction of groundwater has also led to salinity ingress in many areas.

So far, the Tamil Nadu government has not announced when the Mettur dam will be opened, even as it continues its legal battle with Karnataka to secure Tamil Nadu’s share of the Cauvery water. The government has strongly opposed Karnataka’s push to reduce water releases, pressing the Supreme Court to ensure strict adherence to the mandated 12,000 cusecs daily flow.

At the 31st meeting of the Southern Zonal Council held at Mamallapuram and presided over by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay said the legitimate rights of lower riparian States and the livelihoods that depend on assured river flows must be fully protected.

Meanwhile, several farmers’ groups have also begun demanding compensation for crop losses. They are unhappy with the crop loan waiver scheme announced by Vijay and are seeking a full, unconditional waiver of up to ₹1 lakh for all farmers who have taken crop loans.

Officials are also hoping that the monsoon will revive, with about a month left in the season. Any compensation for crop losses, meanwhile, will be subject to the Union and State governments’ norms for natural disasters and a survey by the departments concerned.

S. Vivekanandan, a farmer of Vilakudi, is increasingly worried over the prospects of the Samba crop. A senior official says that as the government is closely watching, it will take steps to safeguard the farmers of the Cauvery delta.

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MADHYA PRADESH



Students thanking the Madhya Pradesh government after Ujjain MP Anil Firojiya assured them that their school would not be shifted. A.M. FARUQUI

Gen Alpha rises, one school at a time

India's government schools have faced criticism over broken infrastructure, poor learning outcomes, and unsafe food. Now, students, inspired by the Gen Z protests, have begun to question those in charge of their education. **Mehul Malpani** captures a protest in Ujjain, where 300 girls got an assurance from the administration that their school would not be shut and merged with one many kilometres away

As the bell that signalled the end of the school day rang at 2.30 p.m. on August 18, scores of girls rushed out of Ujjain's Maharani Lakshmbai Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Sarafa, with cheers and chants of victory. They were celebrating an assurance from the Madhya Pradesh government that their school would not be shut and merged with a school in Daudkhedi village, 6 km away. Many had tears in their eyes – they would be able to continue their studies.

Located opposite the famous Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga Temple in Ujjain, the government girls' school was founded in 1959. Most students here come from the rural pockets around. The celebrations, teachers say, are a result of the girls' struggle and courage that they showed as they raised their voices before government authorities.

On August 13, local newspapers had reported the merger of various schools. Under the Madhya Pradesh government's ongoing merger exercise, 10 more schools, five each from Ujjain city and nearby villages, are being shifted to Daudkhedi, impacting 2,978 students, as per a March 30 order from the Department of Education. Sarafa was to be the 11th.

On August 14, a day before India's 80th Independence Day, more than 300 girls of the school, most between Classes 9 and 12, gathered at the campus. Instead of going to their classrooms, they headed to the Ujjain Collector's office and staged a protest against the government's plans to shift their school.

The demonstration, videos of which went viral in no time, saw the girls, many with their parents, raising slogans against the move, even as some of them broke down. Two girls fainted. Finally, the administration assured them that their voices would be heard.

As per the government's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24 data released by the Ministry of Statistics, India's female literacy rate stands at 74.9% for those aged 7 and above.

Over the past month, school children in various parts of the country, mostly in India's northern States ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan, have risen up to question those in power. Protests are around the education system and its access: broken roads leading to schools, teacher shortages, crumbling classrooms and toilets.

Gen Alpha rising

Most students were inspired by the Gen Z protests over question paper leaks and other irregularities in the competitive examination system. The protests had begun in New Delhi and then spread across the country, leading to the resignation of then Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, a move considered unprecedented for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Central government in its 12 years of rule.

The police brutality on students during their July 20 Sansad Chalo march to Parliament further angered a large section of the nation's youth and their parents, a trusted voter base for the ruling BJP.

While the Gen Z protests largely involved college-going urban youth, the Gen Alpha uprising is seeing school students in small towns and rural regions questioning those responsible for their



My children leave at 7 in the morning by bus and return only by 7 in the evening. How will such small children study after a 12-hour day

A father

education. There is now a growing push for accountability and transparency.

On July 13, students of Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) in Chhindwara district's forested Tamia tehsil raised angry slogans on the school campus alleging poor meal quality in hostels, saying there were worms in their food. Angry students, who gathered outside the school campus in the rain, demanded that the District Collector come and hear their woes. The school administration had not acted on their complaints, they said. The EMRS are Union government-run institutions for students from tribal communities.

On August 15, a group of primary and middle school students from Chandla area in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district stopped the convoy of State Cabinet Minister and local MLA Dilip Ahirwar. They were angry about a broken road to their school, the absence of a boundary wall, and no electricity.

The same day, scores of schoolchildren, accompanied by some adults, from Chhatarpur's Maharajpur tehsil set out on a 40-km march to the district headquarters over infrastructural woes, including a drain that swells in the rains, which the students have to cross to reach their school. Even though the march was stopped, as senior district officials went to meet the protesters, the protest went on for 18 hours and only ended after Maharajpur BJP MLA Kamakhya Pratap Singh met them after midnight.

On August 19, several children of a government primary school and their parents from Damoh district's Arth Kheda village staged a demonstration at the Collector's office over their school building. They said it was dilapidated and its roof could cave in with the rains. They raised slogans like, "Hum apna bhavishya maangte; hum apna school maangte (We demand our future; we demand our school)." They alleged that repair work in January did nothing for the building, and they were tired of administrative assurances. The school is currently being conducted at a temporary location in the village, a protestor said.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous State with over 200 million people, has so far witnessed four such demonstrations by Gen Alpha students in the last month, in Hamirpur, Azam-



Sandipani Government Senior Secondary School in Daudkhedi village of Ujjain, in which 10 schools from the city and nearby villages are being merged. A.M.FARUQUI

garh, and Fatehpur, besides Lucknow, all over the lack of the basics.

On August 17 in Uttar Pradesh's capital Lucknow, over 200 students from Jai Prakash Narayan Sarvodaya Vidyalaya for Girls, marched roughly 3 kilometres to the Dubagga-Kanpur bypass to protest against the shortage of teachers and inadequate basic amenities in their school. There have been similar protests in Rajasthan's Alwar and Barmer districts, and Bihar's Gaya.

Governments feel the pressure

The August 14 protests by the girls in Ujjain prompted top BJP leaders and local officials to visit the school and hold discussions with the students on August 18, the next working day at the school, after the Independence Day-Nag Panchami weekend.

The protest held significance as Ujjain is the hometown of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and a long-standing stronghold of the party that rules the State and is at the Centre. His sister, along with BJP MP from Ujjain Anil Firojiya and Ujjain North MLA Anil Jain Kaluheda showed up at the school with several other administrative staff, including the District Collector.

"Chief Minister Mohan Yadav was informed about the proposal to relocate the Sarafa school to Daudkhedi. Keeping the convenience of the female students in mind, the Chief Minister immediately directed that their classes continue at the existing Sarafa school until alternative arrangements are made," Firojiya said. He added that work would also be undertaken to construct a better school building after identifying a suitable site in the vicinity.

The quick outreach for the girls also holds significance as women are considered a trusted voter base of the ruling BJP, and were credited as an important factor in the party's landslide victory in the 2023 Assembly elections despite anti-incumbency. After the meeting, a group of girls broke down while thanking the leaders.

Monika Sisodia, a Class 12 (commerce) student and one of the girls who led the protests, says, "While we were very disturbed when we found out that our school would be shifted, the August 13 news triggered us. We did not discuss our plans to protest with the teachers, but we decided to fight for our education." Monika says that the girls had read about the Gen Z protests and were inspired by them.

"We have won the fight now, but we were ready to even go on a hunger strike to save our school. Had this not happened, many girls would have had to quit their studies," says Monika, who dreams of becoming a police officer.

When asked if they feared online abuse, threats and trolling that many of the Gen Z protesters have had to face in the aftermath of their agitation, Monika and her peers said they are not active on social media.

A teacher, standing nearby, said, "Some of us teachers and parents were concerned about the possible consequences. So, we spoke to the students and advised them not to engage in any political slandering or language that may be problematic." This came in the wake of criticism from a section, on the Gen Z protests, around abusive language.

Future and studies at risk

While the Sarafa school has got a lease of life, the 10 other schools to be merged with Daudkhedi are seeing dropouts. Prem Singh Parihar, who was the principal of Mahakal Maidan middle school, which has been merged, says that 117 students have taken their transfer certificates (TC) since April, bringing the school's strength down from 282 to 165.

"Most parents who came to get the TCs had the same concern. They did not want to send their children so far. While some have borne the extra financial burden of sending their children to private schools nearby, there are a few who cannot afford it," he says. More than 75 girls left the Sarafa school after their Class 10 results, with the news that their school would be merged, teachers at the school say. The overall strength of the school came down from 580 to 415 for the academic 2026-27.

Nutan Middle School, Jaisinghpura, which has also been shifted to Daudkhedi, has seen 90 of its

300 students taking their TCs, as per data shared by the school. Ujjain Collector Singh, however, denies the dropout claims and says that some teachers who do not want to travel far to work are "making false claims" to prevent shifting.

The school in Daudkhedi has a modern building with 90 classrooms, facilities, and a large campus. The school is surrounded by fields and an open drain runs through its campus making it unsafe.

Even though the government is currently running school buses for travel, students and parents have raised concerns for the children's safety and the extra time spent commuting. For many students who travel from nearby villages, the distance to Daudkhedi goes up 15-20 kilometres.

Most of the students' parents work as daily-wage labourers, while some drive autorickshaws, or sell food and flowers in the temple town. They say that dropping and picking up their children from Daudkhedi will mean a loss of their daily earnings.

"My children leave at 7 in the morning by bus and return only by 7 in the evening. How will they study after a 12-hour day," says the father of two primary school students, who now go to Daudkhedi. He works as a driver for a local BJP leader and does not wish to be named.

Many children also work after school to help their families financially and fear that extra travel time would hamper their work and studies alike.

Roshni Prajapati, a Class 11 (Arts) student at the Sarafa school, said, "My father drives an autorickshaw, so I make cotton lamp wicks after school and earn about ₹50 every day to help my family. There are many girls who sew or apply mehendi for some extra earnings. My parents, and many others, had told us that we may have to quit studies if our school was shifted."

Several teachers and parents oppose school mergers, but would rather not go public, fearing backlash from local BJP leaders and the administration in future. "Officials have already asked school administrations to find out if the teachers had motivated the students to protest. Some of our names have already reached the authorities," a senior teacher from a school says, requesting anonymity.

Burdened teachers and rising vacancies

On August 17, Vidhi Singh, 15, the daughter of a farm labourer and a student of Lucknow's Sarvodaya Vidyalaya, walked over 2 kilometres in the rain. Her four companions suggested they take shelter until the rain slowed. She was resolute: "Let's reach the bypass. Our march is more important." Vidhi wanted to reach the spot where hundreds of others were protesting. "It may help to address the shortage of teachers," she says. "Very few classes were being held due to the teacher shortage. This is impacting our studies in core subjects. We need qualified teachers immediately," Vidhi adds. This year, she and her companions will take the Class 10 board exam.

In the heavy rainfall, the girls formed a human chain and sat down on the Dubagga-Kanpur bypass, demanding the Lucknow District Magistrate come to the site to address their concerns. They voiced their worries about the poor quality of food, the lack of medical services, power cuts, and high-handed staff. The demonstration followed an earlier demonstration on August 14, where over 100 students from the boys' campus of the same institution, managed by the Social Welfare Department, blocked a road to voice similar concerns. Finally, senior officials from the Social Welfare Department and district administration engaged with the students, listened to their concerns, and escorted them back to the school. "We were promised that all our grievances would be solved within a week," adds Vidhi.

Sadanand Mishra, a retired Government Primary School teacher in Lucknow calls the protests the tip of the iceberg. He claims the crisis is much deeper and structural. "Most of the teachers' working hours are spent on non-teaching duties like midday meal distribution, data collection, election duties, HR processes like transfers and leave applications," says Mishra, who is a member of the Uttar Pradesh Prathamik Shikshak Sangh, a teachers union.

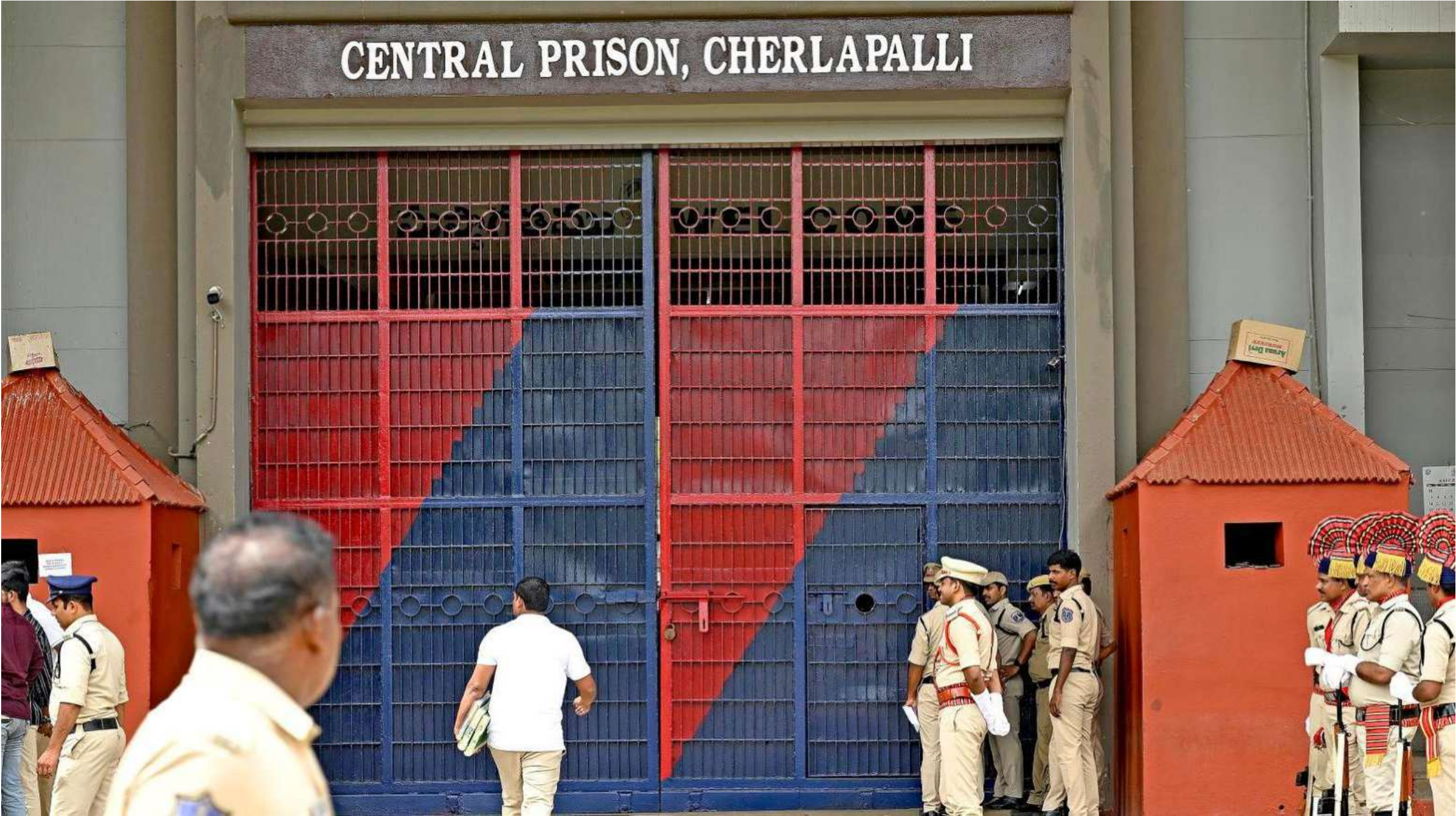
A 2020 report by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration pointed out that only 19% of a teacher's annual school-working hours were spent on teaching activities. Mishra adds, "It's been over five years with no job vacancy for primary teachers advertised in Uttar Pradesh. Numerous young people completing teacher-training degrees are waiting for job opportunities despite lakhs of posts vacant."

A report published by NITI Aayog in November 2023 stated that there were 2.1 lakh vacant teaching positions across government schools in U.P.

On August 15, the Cockroach Janta Party, which was one of the entities that led the Gen Z protests, began its 'School theek karo (fix the school)' campaign. Its founder Abhijeet Dipke is visiting schools across the country and documenting the gaping holes in governance.

Days after the announcement and in the wake of Gen Alpha protests in some districts, the Rajasthan government imposed a restriction on outsiders entering government schools and barred photography and videography without written approval, while citing the "safety and privacy" of students. In an X post, Dipke asked, "All those working in the education department, including Ministers, officials, principals and teachers, should enrol their own children in govt schools. Then watch how quickly our govt schools magically improve. Why do all of them enrol their kids in private schools? Do they not trust their own work?"

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With inputs from Mayank Kumar in Uttar Pradesh



Jailhouse bonds: A 2024 research study, 'Understanding the Risks of Criminal Behavior - A Study on Incarcerated', involving incarcerated people in Telangana, found 83% of participants admitting to having committed crimes along with others. RAMAKRISHNA G.

Partnership in crime, incubated behind bars

Prisons are meant to reform offenders, but for some habitual criminals, they can also provide an environment to make contacts, exchange know-how and forge bonds that continue after release. Investigators in Telangana are finding such links in cases ranging from vehicle thefts to attention-diversion fraud. **Naveen Kumar** examines how prison associations can evolve into criminal partnerships, and whether these links point to an unintended breeding ground for crime in jail

Around 1 a.m. on July 3, cab driver Angoth Thulja stepped out of his white sedan near Mangole X Road in Siddipet to use the washroom. When he turned around, his passenger had driven away in his car.

What Thulja did not know then was that the passenger was not a first-time thief. Police would later identify him as 32-year-old Pendyala Sudarshan, a habitual property offender with 13 criminal cases against him. More significantly, investigators found that some of his alleged associates were men he had met in prison.

The discovery has drawn attention to a question that investigators in Telangana are increasingly encountering: can relationships formed between offenders behind bars become criminal associations after they walk free?

For Thulja, 34, the night had begun as a routine long-distance booking. For nearly nine years, he had made a living driving his own car. On July 3, Sudarshan booked him from L.B. Nagar in Hyderabad to Komuravelli Mallanna Temple in Siddipet, about 111 kilometres away. The fare was fixed at ₹5,000. The passenger said he wanted to visit the temple, stay overnight and return the next afternoon.

They went around the temple, but the passenger said he was hungry and wanted biryani. Eventually, they began the return journey towards Hyderabad.

Near Mangole X Road, after crossing Kukunurpally, Thulja said he needed to use the washroom. "I got out, leaving the AC on. When I turned around, he zoomed away in my car," Thulja recalls.

The car, worth about ₹2.5 lakh, was gone. It was only later, during investigation, that Thulja realised the passenger's insistence on keeping the air-conditioner running at full blast could have been deliberate. Police link the tactic to 'cold diuresis', a physiological response to cold that can cause the bladder to fill faster.

Siddipet police arrested Sudarshan on August 6 while he was allegedly travelling in another stolen car. They subsequently recovered the two cars along with a motorcycle.

According to Siddipet Police Commissioner S.Rashmi Perumal, Sudarshan had previously been jailed for theft. During one such period of imprisonment, he allegedly met Aman Kar, an Odisha resident involved in motorcycle-related crimes. After his release, Sudarshan travelled to Odisha and stayed with Kar.

Two other men allegedly involved in stealing the second car, identified as Raghu and Praveen, were described by a Kukunoorpally police officer as Sudarshan's "jail friends".

The men, investigators say, were not necessarily part of a single gang before they went to pri-



Prisoners will naturally communicate with one another because they are living in the same environment... But among habitual offenders, there can be instances where a contact made inside becomes useful after release.

A SENIOR POLICE OFFICER

son. They had different criminal histories and contacts. Their association developed in the same environment and, allegedly, continued after their release.

A recent case in Hyderabad offers another example. On August 17, Langer Houz police arrested six men in an attention-diversion theft. Police say some of them had met while serving three to five-year sentences in different cases. After their release, they allegedly reunited and carried out a fresh offence.

The group allegedly targeted 71-year-old retired SBI bank manager Dama Mohan near Sha Ghouse Hotel in Langer Houz on August 1. Police recovered 13.5 tolas of gold ornaments, ₹7.4 lakh in cash and two vehicles.

Syed Asad, 46, an autorickshaw driver, allegedly played a key role in bringing the group together. Asad, Mohd Ibrahim and Syed Abdul Majeed were identified as suspected or history sheeters in Chandrayanagutta and Charminar, while Azar Hussain was a history sheetee in Santoshnagar police limits.

A senior police officer familiar with habitual offenders says such relationships were not unusual: "Prisoners will naturally communicate with one another because they are living in the same environment. Most conversations do not result in anything. But among habitual offenders, there can be instances where a contact made inside becomes useful after release."

A prison acquaintance does not necessarily teach another person how to commit a crime. It could provide access to a market, information, a method or contacts in another State. Such relationships may remain dormant until an opportunity arises.

The inside network

A burglary case in Siddipet shows how such networks can extend beyond inmates.

Chikkudu Krishna alias Vengali Bikshapathi, 37, is described by police as a habitual offender with 63 cases registered across Telangana. On June 28, he allegedly broke into the house of Chintha Raj Kumar of Dubbak town while his family was away on pilgrimage and escaped with about 800 grams of gold and 5.5 kg of silver ornaments.

Police formed six teams and examined footage from nearly 500 CCTV cameras across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh before tracing Bikshapathi and recovering the ornaments.

During questioning, Bikshapathi allegedly disclosed links with people in prison, including Gopal, a warder at Nizamabad jail. Dubbak police subsequently named Gopal as accused No.2, alleging that he had helped Bikshapathi secure bail while he was incarcerated.

Investigators alleged that Bikshapathi had

agreed to share stolen property in return for the warder's assistance. The Telangana Prisons Department suspended Gopal after his alleged involvement surfaced; he was absconding at the time.

Police also suspected the involvement of another warder and an Armed Reserve constable who were allegedly associated with Bikshapathi earlier. Investigators say he had contacts in Cherlapalli and Nizamabad jails and had developed relationships with people who could help him get out of jail. Police also allege that he supported prisoners' families by selling stolen property and passing on money.

According to police, Bikshapathi was released on a Saturday night and allegedly committed another offence the following Sunday.

What research says

The influence of fellow offenders on criminal behaviour has been examined among prisoners in Telangana.

A 2024 study, 'Understanding the Risks of Criminal Behavior - A Study on Incarcerated', involving incarcerated people in Telangana, found 83% of participants admitting to having committed crimes along with others. The researchers identified peer influence, financial benefit, perceived low risk of conviction, the excitement associated with crime and opportunities to learn more about offending behaviour among factors influencing how offenders assessed risk.

People are influenced by the social environment around them, but that influence is not uniform. One who is inclined towards offending may be more receptive to criminal information or relationships than somebody genuinely trying to reform.

RAMANA PRASAD, Psychologist

train and talk to them about how they can try and reflect on their acts," she says.

Psychologist Ramana Prasad, familiar with correctional settings, says peer influence is not uniform.

"People are influenced by the social environment around them, but that influence is not uniform. A person already inclined towards offending may be more receptive to criminal information or relationships than somebody who is genuinely trying to reform. The prison environment can expose people to different experiences, but exposure alone does not determine what they will do after release," he says.

That distinction matters in Telangana, where prisons hold people convicted of widely different offences and with varying criminal histories. They inevitably interact in barracks, during meals, at work and in common areas.

A senior officer in the Prisons Department says such interaction is unavoidable: "People are incarcerated together, so naturally they will communicate and form friendships. But the percentage of cases where this actually results in a new criminal association is very small."

The challenge, the officer says, is to distinguish ordinary interaction from relationships that could undermine rehabilitation. Prison intelligence becomes important in identifying repeated associations, habitual offenders directing activi-

ties from inside and relationships that continue after release.

The network does not always look like a gang. The attention-diversion gang targeting ATMs in Hyderabad shows how criminal operations can be divided among people with different roles. The gang allegedly obtained debit cards from pickpockets, swapped them with those of vulnerable victims and used them to withdraw money.

Earlier in August, police arrested six people and seized 130 ATM cards, two POS machines, three autorickshaws, five mobile phones and ₹27,230 in cash.

The person stealing a card did not necessarily need to know how the fraud would be carried out, while the person making the withdrawal did not need to be a skilled pickpocket.

Criminal networks can, therefore, operate through specialised roles rather than a conventional gang structure. Investigators say the same principle of exchange can potentially take place in prison too.

A police officer dealing with organised property crime says investigators increasingly look beyond the immediate offence.

"When we arrest a habitual offender, we look at his previous cases, his associates, his movements and his contacts. If somebody who was earlier operating alone suddenly starts working with people involved in different activities, we want to know where those contacts came from," he adds.

In Sudarshan's case, the answer, at least for some of his alleged associates, appears in the police records: prison.

What follows a prisoner out of jail

For prison authorities, the larger concern is not simply what happens between inmates while they are incarcerated. It is what leaves with them.

A prisoner walks out with family responsibilities, employment difficulties and the challenge of rebuilding a life. Rehabilitation programmes are intended to help with that transition. But habitual offenders may also leave with relationships formed behind bars.

These cases are not proof that prisons routinely incubate organised crime, nor that incarceration itself creates criminality. They do, however, explain why investigators examine prison associations when looking into repeat offending.

Director General of Telangana Prisons, Soumya Mishra says the department continuously monitors the records of habitual offenders. The State's recidivism (repeat offending) rate is around 4%, she points out.

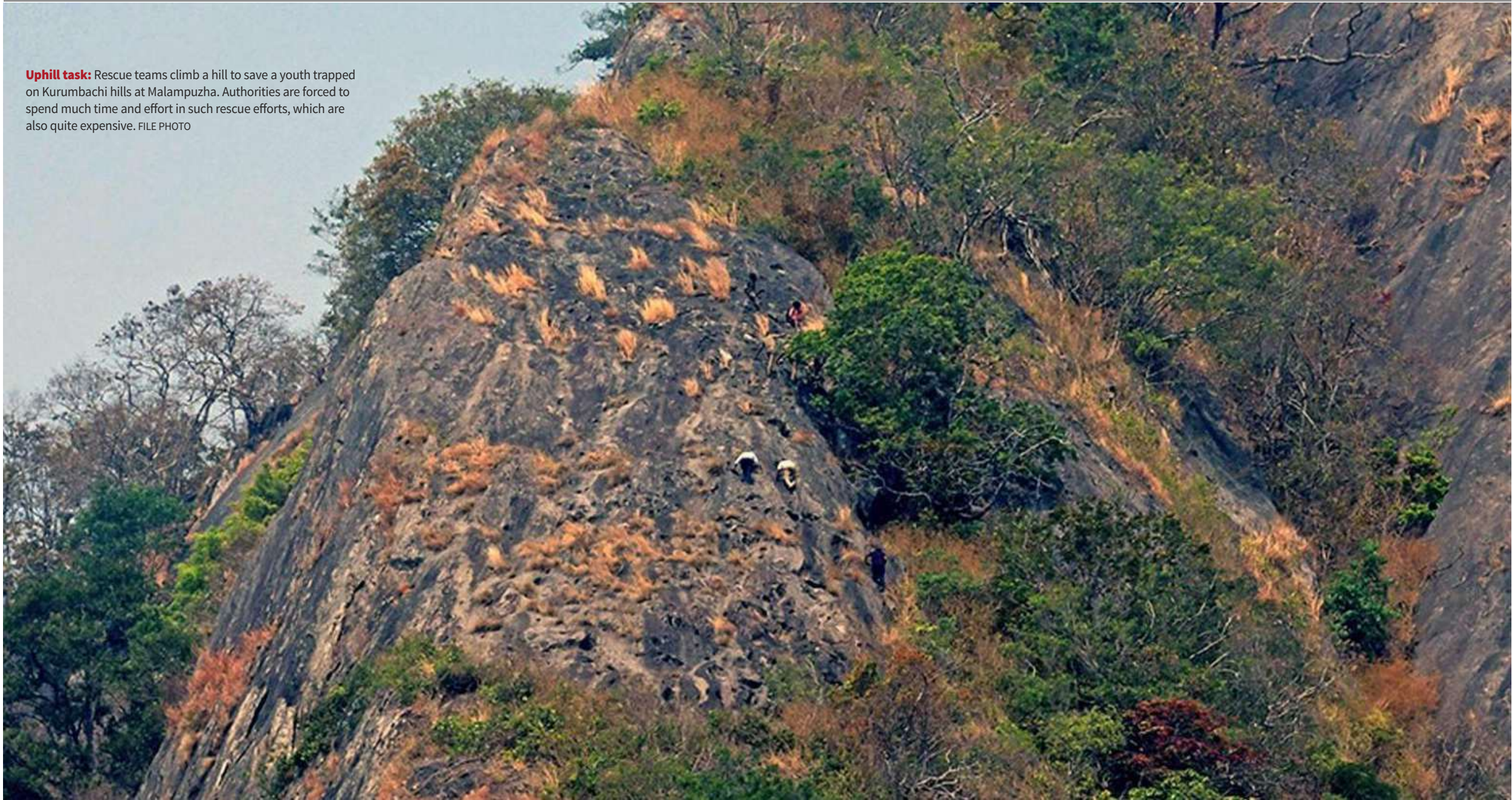
The issue, then, is not isolating inmates from one another but identifying which relationships matter.

That becomes harder as crime grows more specialised. The person who steals a car may not be the one who disposes of it. The person who picks a pocket may not be the one who uses the stolen card. A stolen mobile phone can move through another market while drugs can cross State borders through people who never meet the eventual seller.

The challenge for prison authorities is to identify relationships that could enable crime without treating every interaction between inmates as a security concern. That means tracking patterns that emerge after release: former inmates who reconnect, habitual offenders who suddenly acquire new associates and contacts that resurface in fresh investigations.

Understanding these connections could become an important part of both crime detection and prison intelligence. For investigators, that could mean looking beyond the offence itself and asking not just who committed it, but where the connections that made it possible were formed.

Uphill task: Rescue teams climb a hill to save a youth trapped on Kurumbachi hills at Malampuzha. Authorities are forced to spend much time and effort in such rescue efforts, which are also quite expensive. FILE PHOTO



Wannabe adventurers perform motorbike stunts on roads, venture into unknown forests, and step into unfamiliar waterbodies, posing risk to their lives as well as others.' **Aathira Haridas** tries to find out what goes through their minds and also elicits response from govt. authorities who usually bail out the adventure-seekers in distress



CM
YK

Russian drones kill 14 people at a mall in a central Ukrainian city



U.S., South Korea wrap up military drills 6 days earlier than planned



Japan protests Russian missile tests off disputed Kuril islands



Israel Army and settlers kill two Palestinians in separate incidents



Imran Khan shifted back to jail after medical check-up

DUBAI/WASHINGTON

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf during a visit to the grave of an Iraqi paramilitary commander killed in a 2020 U.S. drone strike. AP

“With preparedness

Strict watch: Security personnel cordon off a street outside the Shifa International Hospital in Islamabad. REUTERS

Nanda Malini

Election campaign placards for the upcoming Berlin State elections for the far-right Alternative for Germany party (AfD) and the Christian Democratic Union amongst others, hang on lamp posts in Berlin on Friday. Berlin goes to polls in regional elections on September 20. AFP

Asim Munir

CM YK



Masha and the Bear, a cartoon about a mischievous little girl and a retired circus bear, is a cult classic in Russia. AP

Ukraine sanctions Russia toon *Masha and the Bear*

Agence France-Presse
KYIV

Ukraine has sanctioned Russian hit children’s cartoon *Masha and the Bear* and its producers in a step towards banning the series, Kyiv’s Culture Minister said Friday, slamming it as a Russian “propaganda” tool. The cartoon about a mischievous little girl and a retired circus bear is a cult classic in Russia. It has been viewed tens of billions of times on YouTube alone, broadcast in some 100 countries, and has inspired several spin-offs.

But it has also faced criticism in Ukraine and its allies – including the United Kingdom and Estonia – as painting Russia in a positive light and an instrument of Moscow’s soft power.

“Ukraine has imposed sanctions against the producers and distributors of the Russian animated series ‘Masha and the Bear’,” Ukrainian Culture Minister Tetyana Berezhna said on X.

“This creates legal grounds to block the content in Ukraine and engage international platforms to restrict its monetisation and distribution,” she said, adding that “Russian propaganda has no place on children’s screens.”

The Kremlin has laughed off the allegations. Asked about the sanctions, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that the cartoon series has “conquered the world” by promoting “the finest human qualities”. “The fact that Ukraine has launched a war against cartoons, too, likely serves as yet another illustration of the ugly nature” of the Ukrainian authorities, Mr. Peskov told reporters.

The sanctions – imposed through a decree issued by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky – target a Russian studio that produced the cartoon, Animaccord, its founder, as well as the series’ scriptwriter and director.

Associated Press
CEUTA

For weeks, migrants in the Spanish territory of Ceuta had gathered on a beach away from the city centre, sleeping on cardboard sheets, under reed huts and guarding their few possessions in tattered plastic bags.

They were gone by Thursday morning after Spanish police escorted them to makeshift shelters. But an hour later, other migrants were combing through the trash they had left behind for anything useful: an abandoned mattress, plastic chairs, sheets, a scrap of tarp.

The scene exemplified the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ceuta, where up to 10,000 migrants remain in the city weeks after more than 72,000 people poured into the small Spanish territory neighbouring Morocco. Three weeks later, Spanish authorities were struggling to shelter and attend to those who refused to leave – or even determine how many migrants were still in the city of 84,000.

Within days of the initial border rush, in which at least 90 people died, most migrants went back to Morocco, realising the difficulties of staying in Ceuta and their slim chances of reaching mainland Europe. But thousands remained, hiding in the woods, on beaches and



Still stranded: Spanish police escort migrants who crossed from Morocco into Spain as they return to a beach in Ceuta on Friday after being expelled from the area the previous day. AP

outside a migrant reception centre.

Humanitarian crisis

City officials estimate that 9,000 to 10,000 migrants – including about 2,000 minors – could still be in the city, based on the number of daily food rations handed out by aid groups. Spain’s Interior Ministry puts the figure at roughly 5,000 people.

The UN refugee agency highlighted large humanitarian and operational challenges in Ceuta in an interview with AP, specifically around access to shelter, basic services and food. While most of those who crossed in late July are from Morocco, people from war-torn Sudan, Mali and Yemen also reached

the Spanish exclave.

The UN refugee agency urged Spanish authorities to start processing their asylum claims as soon as possible, estimating that about 1,200 migrants in Ceuta could be eligible for international protection, according to Paula Barra-china, a spokesperson for the agency in Spain.

The Spanish government says it is working to house the remaining migrants in the city, and return a sense of normalcy to Ceuta. On Thursday, Spain’s Minister of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration Elma Saiz said the government had secured space to accommodate 1,800 migrants in a parking lot and a military facility sometimes used for

religious events. It is looking for more space.

Even so, an AP photographer on Thursday saw migrants still roaming the streets. Elsewhere, hundreds of women and minors were sheltering in makeshift centres run by locals.

Khadija Rifai, a 20-year-old woman from Morocco, acknowledged that some people were receiving help, but didn’t know what Spain planned to do with adults like her. “They help the minors and the youngsters, but they haven’t found any solutions for us,” she said Wednesday.

Ms. Rifai said her life in Morocco was “normal” but in late July, she and her husband swam to the Spanish territory in search

UN Security Council holds second election for next Secretary-General

Agence France-Presse
UNITED NATIONS

The UN’s most powerful body, the Security Council, met Friday to hold another straw poll to gauge the popularity of a growing field of contenders to lead the embattled organisation. Costa Rica’s Rebeca Grynspan was the front-runner after last month’s first informal vote, in which the council’s 15 members, including the five with veto power, pass judgment in secret on the candidates.

Argentina’s Rafael Grossi – the current head of the UN nuclear watchdog – is also a candidate along with Chile’s Michelle Bachelet, Ecuador’s Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Guyana’s Caro-



In the ring: UN Secretary-General candidate Ivonne A-Baki from Ecuador speaks at UN headquarters in New York on Thursday. AFP

lyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Uganda’s Olara Otunnu and Senegal’s Macky Sall. After the first round concluded, Ecuador’s Ivonne A-Baki threw her hat into the race to succeed Antonio Guterres, who will complete his second five-year term on December 31, this year.

“While the first straw

poll set the scene for the Secretary-General race, the second may give us some direction about where it is headed,” said the International Crisis Group’s Daniel Forti.

“Diplomats expect fluctuations in the vote distribution compared to the July poll. Most will be watching to see whether

the early front-runners consolidate their support or slip in the standings.

“It is unlikely that any candidate will emerge from [Friday’s] poll with a decisive lead.” Mr. Forti said the veto-wielding nations – Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States – might wait until later to express their preferences, while new contenders could emerge.

Even if a candidate earns the required nine votes from the 15 available in the Security Council, they must also avoid a veto by the five major powers, which are deeply divided.

Once a candidate clears those bars, their name will go to the General Assembly of all UN members for confirmation.

On the go



Gearing up: Camels are herded into Mogadishu, Somalia, ahead of Mawlid al-Nabi, on Friday. About 1,530 camels are slaughtered every year in the city to mark the occasion. REUTERS

Kurdish-led SDF integrates into Syrian state, ending years of *de facto* autonomy

Agence France-Presse
BEIRUT

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), whose leader announced their integration into the state on Thursday, was the Washington-backed *de facto* army of the Kurds’ autonomous administration in Syria and was at the forefront of the battle against jihadists.

After being Syria’s most highly-trained and organised force for years, experts say the SDF’s dissolution marks the end of an era to the country’s Kurds, who had long dreamt of autonomy before the 2024 fall of Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad, which saw Washington drop them for the new U.S.-friendly authori-

ties in Damascus.

The force was formed in 2015 at the instigation of the United States, impressed by the Kurdish fighters who had defeated the Islamic State (IS) group in Kobane in the north, and seeking a reliable partner in the battle against the jihadists.

The SDF then spearheaded the battle against the IS, which was defeated territorially in Syria four years later.

It amassed around 1,00,000 fighters at its peak, was composed of Kurds and Arabs and controlled swathes of Syria’s oil-rich north and northeast.

But following January clashes that saw Kurds lose large chunks of territory to

government troops, the two sides signed a deal to integrate Kurdish military and civilian institutions into the state.

Arabs within their ranks also defected *en masse* after Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s Army took control of two previously Kurdish-held provinces, Raqa and Deir Ez-zor, leaving them with half the strength they had before, according to Syria specialist Fabrice Balanche.

The core

Balanche said the SDF’s hard core remained intact, comprising the People’s Protection Units (YPG) of some 30,000 members as well as the all-female Women’s Protection Units.



End of an era: The U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces was formed in 2015 after Kurdish fighters defeated IS in Kobane. REUTERS

Mazloum Abdi, head of the SDF, did not mention the mechanism by which the force and the Kurdish security forces were integrated into the ranks of the Syrian state, following months of wrangling between the two sides.

“Dissolving for the SDF means a bitter end” for the Kurds, Mutlu Civiroglu, a Washington-based analyst and expert on the Kurds, told AFP, adding that it marked “the end of Kur-

dish strength in Syria”.

The Kurdish force was faced with repeated Turkish invasions between 2016 and 2019, with Ankara saying it wanted to push these fighters away from its border.

Turkey has long viewed the SDF as linked to the Kurdish militant Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which waged a decades-long insurgency in the country.

Following a call by its jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK formally renounced its armed struggle against Turkey in May last year, drawing a line under four decades of violence that has claimed some 50,000 lives.

Despite denying any links with the PKK, “it is in-

deed the PKK that directs the YPG behind the scenes”, Mr. Balanche said, referring to the People’s Protection Units, the SDF’s core base.

‘Very successful’ force

“The YPG was formed in 2011 by PKK veterans,” including SDF chief Abdi, Syria analyst Nanar Hawach of the International Crisis Group told AFP at a previous time.

The January agreement, under which Kurdish fighters would be integrated into state structures, stipulates that the SDF commit to expelling all non-Syrian PKK leaders and members from the country.

“While limited in number, they have held significant influence in com-

mand and administrative roles,” Mr. Hawach told AFP, adding their numbers are estimated in the hundreds to low thousands.

In his speech on Thursday, Mr. Abdi acknowledged that “thousands of young Kurdish men and women” supported the SDF from “other parts of Kurdistan”, referring to areas of Iran, Iraq and Turkey. He also affirmed that, “at our request and according to a practical plan, those forces withdrew from here, and we can say that a new phase has begun in this region.”

The SDF’s integration into the state is a major victory for Mr. al-Sharaa, who has been trying to cement control over all of Syria since Mr. Assad’s ouster.



MIKEL ARTETA



ENZO MARESCA



ANDONI IRAOLA



MICHAEL CARRICK



XABI ALONSO

Who will seize control of the post-Pep Premier League era?

With Guardiola abdicating the throne and leaving his kingdom after six top-flight English titles in 10 years, there will be an almighty war of succession. The 2026-27 Premier League season will be the battleground to decide whom the power is transferred to

N. Sudarshan

The 10 years Pep Guardiola spent at Manchester City represent one of the greatest acts of dynasty-building in the sporting universe. Not only did the Catalan coach City to six Premier League titles, five League Cups, three FA Cups, one UEFA Champions League crown and one at the FIFA Club World Cup, he did so by assembling multiple great sides, revolutionising tactics, and constantly reinventing himself.

Dominant reign

Guardiola's six Premier League trophies are second only to Alex Ferguson's 13 at Manchester United, and even in the four years when City did not win the top prize, it stayed in the top three. No other coach won more than one Premier League title during Guardiola's time in England.

When such a king abdicates the throne and leaves his kingdom, as Guardiola did at the end of the 2025-26 campaign, there is bound to be an almighty jostle among those below to be the immediate heir. The 2026-27 Premier League season, which got underway late on Friday (August 21), will be the battleground to decide whom the power is transferred to.

The set-up is conducive for an intriguing competition. City without Guardiola will be one of nine clubs to have new coaches, and two others in Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur did not have Michael Carrick and Roberto De Zerbi in place at the start of the year.

Mikel Arteta, who secured Arsenal its first English top-flight crown in 22 years, is the most experienced, having been in the job for a little over six years and seven months. Unai Emery, who masterminded Aston Villa's 2025-26 Europa League triumph, is next, with a stint now at

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roughly three years and 10 months.

Though Guardiola has exited the scene, his giant shadow still looms. Enzo Maresca, who has replaced the 55-year-old at the Etihad, and Arteta have served as his assistants. Xabi Alonso, installed as Chelsea's new manager, was once Guardiola's midfield marshal at Bayern Munich.

The post-Pep Premier League era will not have a clean break in terms of tactics too, for Guardiola has left a deep imprint, both in terms of the first principles he introduced, and how he evolved and shed his orthodoxies to cater to the League's fast-changing demands.

When he first arrived, Guardiola was a cleric of the possession-heavy school and was canonical in his belief that retaining the ball was the best route to success. So much so that even goalkeepers weren't spared; one of his first decisions at City was to replace Joe Hart, a top-class shot-stopper, with Claudio Bravo, a ball-playing goalie.

And it felt like the league as a whole – with the glorious exception of Jose Mourinho's Manchester United – was trying to inculcate parts of it.

Guardiola then changed tack to embrace high-energy players and those with great individual skills in order to adjust to the breathless, end-to-end football that the likes of Jurgen Klopp (Liverpool) and Mauricio Pochettino (Tottenham) introduced. The controlled aggression of the earlier years made way for a more expressive and expansive style.

Philosophical blasphemy

And in his last four seasons in charge, he played with one of world football's purest strikers in Erling Haaland. For a man who once made Lionel Messi turn out as a False 9, and then won two

Premier League trophies in 2020-21 and 2021-22 with midfielders as top-scorers (Ilkay Gundogan with 13 goals and Kevin de Bruyne 15), to have Haaland score 112 times over four campaigns would have been akin to philosophical blasphemy.

However, football is now more direct and physical than in recent times and it is to Guardiola's credit that he tweaked his methods and put in place a blueprint for success. "You need to adapt, evolve," City's Maresca said recently. "Set-pieces, man to man – it's a little bit the direction where football is going. We managers... it's our duty to find solutions."

Who among Arteta, Carrick, Alonso, Andoni Iraola and Maresca will answer the call? For one, the sight of Arteta, Carrick and Alonso walking briskly up and down the touchline is sure to remind fans of their glory days as players for Arsenal, Manchester United and Liverpool not so long ago. For a certain generation, it will appear like they are reliving a childhood dream.

Arteta has the first-mover advantage, having already won the League and possessing a winning combination. The addition of Bruno Guimaraes from Newcastle for GBP 75 million will reduce the inordinate burden on midfielder Declan Rice. But Arsenal's unsuccessful pursuit of Vinicius Junior suggests that the outfit is mindful of the need of a world-class threat upfront.

Carrick, who took over at Old Trafford after the sacking of Ruben Amorim, had an impressive stint as caretaker manager, winning 12 and drawing three of his 17 matches in 2025-26, and helping United qualify for the Champions League after a two-season hiatus. The question before the astute 45-year-old is whether his United has the quality to sustain simultaneous domestic and continental challenges.

For Alonso, Chelsea is the opportunity to light up an aura that has seemingly dimmed after a failed seven-month stint as Real Madrid's boss. The 44-year-old is known to possess a shrewd tactical brain, and his role in ending Bayern Munich's hegemony in Germany – 11 straight Bundesliga titles from 2012-13 to 2022-23 – by leading a young Bayer Leverkusen side to

The ground is fertile for competition. Who among Arteta, Carrick, Alonso, Iraola and Maresca will answer the call?

its maiden crown is noteworthy. The addition of 24-year-old English attacking midfielder Morgan Rogers for a whopping GBP 117 million shows that he has Chelsea's wholehearted trust.

Andoni Iraola's ascent to the top job at Liverpool after making a mark at Bournemouth is eerily similar to Graham Potter's entry into Chelsea in 2022 after a stellar show at Brighton & Hove Albion. But Potter was dismissed in less than seven months, a fate Iraola will want to avoid.

The 44-year-old is agnostic to any style of play that is not front-footed, a factor that endeared him to the Liverpool hierarchy after a dreary end to Arne Slot's time. Can he manage to keep the club faithful happy without the services of Mohamed Salah, who left after nine glorious years?

Tough act to follow

Maresca's situation at City is comparable to what David Moyes faced at United after the latter succeeded Ferguson in 2013. The Italian's first test will be to not get crushed under the burden of expectations after Guardiola's supremely successful tenure. It helps that City is not known to be trigger-happy, for both Roberto Mancini and Manuel Pellegrini enjoyed tenures lasting three years or more before Guardiola arrived.

Maresca also comes with a certain pedigree, having led Chelsea to FIFA Club World Cup glory in 2025, and has added England midfielder Elliot Anderson for a hefty GBP 116 million fee. But he will have to compete without the talismanic World Cup winner Rodri, who has shifted to Barcelona, and fellow playmaker Bernardo Silva, who has moved to Real Madrid.

Will he be guided by the spirit of Guardiola or will the ghost of Guardiola haunt him?



STACKING UP



ATP Men's Top 15

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Jannik Sinner	24	13,450	17
2	Carlos Alcaraz	23	8,160	17
3	Alexander Zverev	29	8,090	20
4	Felix Auger-Aliassime	26	4,740	22
5	Novak Djokovic	39	3,670	16
6	Ben Shelton	23	3,760	22
7	Daniil Medvedev	30	3,580	23
8	Alex de Minaur	27	3,560	24
9	Taylor Fritz	28	3,375	22
10	Flavio Cobolli	24	3,330	26
11	Rafael Jodar	19	2,621	24
12	Learner Tien	20	2,545	22
13	Alexander Bublik	29	2,525	26
14	Jiri Lehecka	24	2,470	21
15	Lorenzo Musetti	24	2,415	22

Top Indians ▶



Sumit Nagal
Rank 239 ▼ 4 spots



Manas Dhamne
Rank 368 ▼ 6 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	76,465	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 22



Test Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Harry Brook	852	898
2	Joe Root	840	932
3	Steve Smith	833	947
4	Travis Head	819	884
5	Temba Bavuma	775	806
6	Kamindu Mendis	744	784
7	Shubman Gill	743	807
8	Rachin Ravindra	740	740
9	Yashasvi Jaiswal	733	858
10	Babar Azam	716	882

Test Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Jasprit Bumrah	870	908
2	Matt Henry	861	870
3	Mitchell Starc	826	852
4	Marco Jansen	825	825
5	Pat Cummins	818	914
6	Scott Boland	820	820
7	Kagiso Rabada	807	902
8	Noman Ali	800	853
9	Josh Hazlewood	795	864
10	Gus Atkinson	729	766

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	719	756
6	Babar Azam	689	894
7	Joe Root	674	810
8	Shai Hope	673	782
9	Charith Asalanka	659	705
10	Harry Tector	653	730

ODI Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	714	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	Adil Rashid	613	631
8	Shaheen Afridi	604	691
9	Mehidy Hasan	602	722
10	Adil Rashid	599	671

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

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
8	Varun Chakravarthy	663	818
10	Mohammad Nawaz	658	672



We will soon know whether Russell has found a way during the summer break to address the pace deficit to his colleague. The title fight could still be between the Mercedes drivers; they have the best package. But the last few races have shown that Ferrari and McLaren are not far off. It is an extra set of variables that the 28-year-old could have done without.

Antonelli's emergence, Hamilton's new lease of life, Russell's burden of expectations, Verstappen's displeasure — a hotly debated set of disruptive regulations has led to a curious first half of 2026. How will these storylines play out after the mid-season break?

The 2026 season of Formula One ushered in some of the most drastic regulatory changes in the sport's history. As teams and drivers still try to get around the new cars, the year's first half has been a mixed bag for on-track action. Nonetheless, there has been enough to keep the fans interested. With the FI carnival reconvening after the summer break in Zandvoort this weekend, *The Hindu* reviews the major themes so far to see what could lie ahead.

The new rules, which brought hybrid power units closer to a 50-50 split between the internal combustion engine and the electric motor, raised concerns at the outset that the cars would be energy-starved. When pre-season testing began, four-time champion Max Verstappen was scathing in his criticism. The battery's limitations meant drivers had to ease off through fast corners to maximise electric power on straights, where time could be gained.

Add to it the complex algorithms governing how the battery deploys and harvests energy, and drivers were forced to adapt their driving styles to the car's limitations. In the first few races, this led to cars being passed and then passing back as the battery pack emptied and recharged, resulting in 'yo-yo racing'. The fans were none the wiser, as one couldn't ascertain whether the moves were genuine. It took time for teams to adapt, and a rule tweak in Miami has also helped reduce some of the worst effects of 'yo-yo racing'. Still, on energy-hun-

GEORGE RUSSELL AND LEWIS HAMILTON

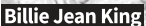
One of the great joys of watching elite sport is to marvel at the ability of a wonderkid ruffling the feathers of the established order. Even as F1 has been besieged by negativity around the new regulations, the one bright light has been Kimi Antonelli. The Italian, who will graduate out of his teens on Tuesday (August 25), has taken the F1 world by storm in his sophomore campaign, winning six of the 11 races and leading the championship by 50 points.

The Mercedes driver has taken a clear step up from his error-strewn rookie year, stringing together five consecutive wins at one stage. His aggressive driving style, with sharp steering inputs, seems to work well with the current cars, and the youngster has made full use of the class-leading Mercedes to build a comfortable lead. Team boss Toto Wolff's decision to throw him in the deep end last year appears a stroke of genius.

George Russell bided his time in an uncompetitive Williams for three years before earning a promotion to Mercedes in 2022 to partner Lewis Hamilton. Unfortunately, it came at a time when the German marque, which had won eight successive titles, messed up the 2022 ground-effect regulations. He was saddled with a car that could at best fight for the occasional win. But in his three years alongside Hamilton, Russell showed he could go toe-to-toe with one of the greatest drivers in history. By the end of 2024, he was faster.

So when he won the first race in Australia from pole and then dominated the sprint in China, he would have felt that his patience was finally paying

The second edition of the US Open's radical mixed doubles scheme gets underway next week. The revamp, which came into force last year, was controversial: the main points of criticism were that it prioritised high-profile singles players and devalued the title because of the shortened match format and the exclusion of several doubles specialists. Sara Errani and Andrea Pavanetti struck a blow for the traditionalists by winning it; they now have four Major mixed doubles titles together. With the continuing conversation around the event, it's an opportune moment to look at the players and teams with the most success in Grand Slam mixed doubles.



MOST GRAND SLAM MIXED DOUBLES TITLES (BY TEAM)						
Player	Australian Open	French Open	Wimbledon	US Open	Span	Titles
Margaret Court & Ken Fletcher	2	3	4	1	1963–1968	10
Doris Hart & Frank Sedgman	2	2	2	2	1949–1952	8
Billie Jean King & Owen Davidson	0	1	4	3	1967–1974	8
Doris Hart & Vic Seixas	0	1	3	3	1953–1955	7
Margaret Court & Marty Riessen	1	1	1	3	1969–1975	6

GETTY IMAGES

The Duhner Wattrennen is a niche horse race held on the tidal mud flats of the North Sea in Duhnen, a seaside resort in the district of Cuxhaven, Germany.

First run in 1902, the annual event is strictly timed — held in

July or August when the sea-floor is exposed by the ebbing tides.

Duhnen, located about 351 kilometres northwest of Berlin, was at one time a remote fishing and farming village.

But it has grown into one of the tourist centres of Cuxhaven, helped in no small part by the

horse racing, which draws crowds of more than 30,000. The event is accompanied by live bands and other entertainment programmes, adding to the festive atmosphere.

The wet sand, which is softer under-hoof than turf, is said to reduce the impact on a horse's tendons and joints.

This photograph from Duhnen features the harness format, in which horses run with a specific gait (a trot or a pace), pulling a light two-wheeled cart equipped with bicycle wheels.

The cart is called a sulky, because — anecdotally — it once was the choice of unsociable people prone to fits of sulking.