

Daily Current Affairs





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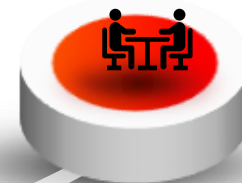
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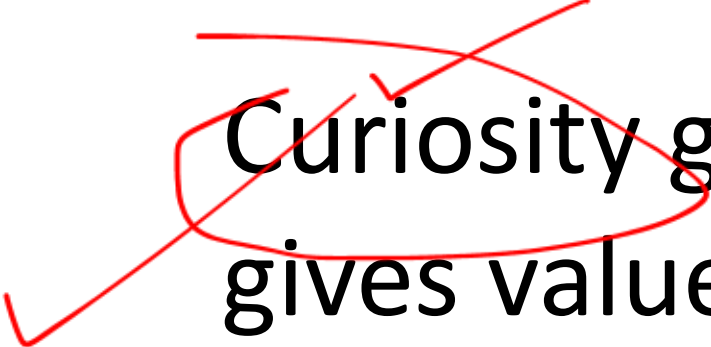
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Nilekani to lead task force on exams: Modi

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

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

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

Nistula Hebbar
Mumbai Press

NEW DELHI

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

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

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

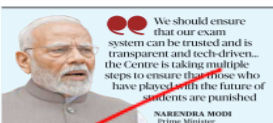
Mr. Joshi, who also holds the portfolios of Consumer Affairs, Food and

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

We should ensure that our exam system can be trusted, and is transparent and tech-driven, the Centre is taking multiple steps to ensure that those who have played a role in the future of students are punished. We have already announced the formation of a task-force group. We are bringing a stringent law in Parliament on Monday," he said.

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

"This is ultimately only



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

a high-powered attempt to fix the Pradhan Mantri's retrievably compromised image," he said on X.

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

Rahul questions Shah over 'barbaric assault' in Delhi

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

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

Secretary Anita Karwal, and logistics expert Amit Lal Meena.

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

Joshi takes charge

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



INSIDE



Israeli settlers set two mosques on fire in West Bank

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

India scaling new heights in defence production: PM

NEW DELHI India is scaling new heights in defence production, exports, and political cooperation with friendly nations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday in Meerut.

RELATED REPORTS ON PAGES 4 & 5

Tehran says it is halting 'retaliatory strikes' on U.S.

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

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

Iran's Army spokesperson Mohammad Akrami has reportedly been retaliatory. We have also halted our retaliatory operations."

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

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

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

TALKS ON OMAN PAGES 14 & 15

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

K. Keerthivasan
GLASGOW

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

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

Hours after Rishikanta Singh Chamamban finished second in the men's 60kg category, Mirabai Chanu produced a golden moment in the women's 48kg class. For the latter, it was her third successive Commonwealth Games yellow metal after Gold Coast 2008 and Birmingham 2022.

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

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

After failing to clear 105kg in her first clean and jerk attempt, Mirabai managed to come back and clear the challenge in her second attempt.



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

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

Ruth Asquith Nyong of Nigeria won silver with a total lift of 168kg while Irene Jane Henry of Malaysia clinched bronze with a combined lift of 264kg.

Malaysia's Mohamed Aniq Kaidan won the gold with a total lift of 272kg, setting a new Games record. The 26-year-old lifter also registered a new Games high in clean and jerk with 128kg.

Kenya's Joshua Amunga crossed the 60kg to 159kg mark, while the Maldives' Mohamed Ali was the only male lifter to finish with a combined lift of 264kg (snatch: 128kg; clean and jerk: 143kg).

Govt. warns seafarers about jobs in 'volatile' Black Sea

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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Nilekani to lead task force on exams: Modi

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Nistula Hebbar
Maitri Porecha
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Mr. Joshi, who also holds the portfolios of Consumer Affairs, Food and

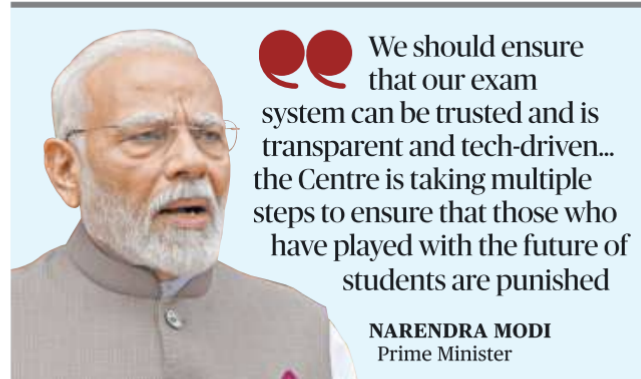
Public Distribution, and New and Renewable Energy, chaired a meeting of the Ministry to review the implementation of various schemes and other initiatives.

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

'Compromised image'

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

Responding to the an-



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

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

"This is ultimately only

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

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

Rahul questions Shah over 'barbaric assault' in Delhi

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

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

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

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 5

Secretary Anita Karwal, and logistics expert Amrit Lal Meena.

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

Joshi takes charge

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

of Infosys.

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

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

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

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

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

RELATED REPORTS ON
» PAGES 4 & 5



Topic

Major Announcement

Chairperson

Objective

Reason

Government's Goal

Details

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the formation of a **high-powered task force** to reform India's examination system.

Nandan Nilekani, co-founder of Infosys and former UIDAI Chairman, will head the task force.

Recommend measures to make examinations **leak-proof, transparent, secure, and technology-driven**.

The move comes after nationwide protests over the **NEET paper leak** and concerns about examination integrity.

Restore public trust in examinations, punish those responsible for paper leaks, and modernize the examination ecosystem.



"Our exam system should be trusted."	Restore confidence among students and parents.
"Transparent and tech-driven."	Greater use of digital technologies, AI, cybersecurity, and secure testing systems.
"Those who have played with the future of students will be punished."	Strict action against paper leak mafias and corrupt officials.
"Fast-track courts and a stringent law."	Speedier prosecution and stronger legal deterrence.

Expected Role of the Task Force

Area	Expected Recommendations
Paper Security ✓	End-to-end encrypted question paper management
Technology ✓	AI-based monitoring, digital audit trails, cybersecurity
Exam Centres	Stronger surveillance and verification systems
Recruitment	Improved accountability of testing agencies
Governance	Structural reforms in the National Testing Agency (NTA)
Transparency	Better grievance redressal and public communication

Likely Members

The article mentions that the multidisciplinary panel is expected to include experts such as:

Member	Background
Nandan Nilekani	Former UIDAI Chairman; Aadhaar & UPI architect
Dr. S. Somanath	Former ISRO Chairman
Tapan Deka	Former IB Director
V. Kamakoti	IIT Madras Director
Amit Lal Meena	Logistics and governance expert
Anita Karwal	Former Education Secretary

Why Nandan Nilekani?

Achievement	Relevance to Exams
Led Aadhaar	Secure digital identity verification
Built UPI ecosystem	Large-scale secure digital infrastructure
Technology governance	Experience in nationwide digital systems
Public-sector reforms	Can design scalable, transparent exam architecture

• Meet the six-member panel

PAGE 6



Nandan Nilekani
Infosys co-founder



S Somanath
Ex-Chairman, ISRO



Tapan Deka
Ex-Director, IB



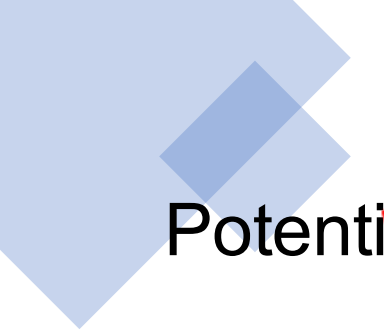
V Kamakoti
Director, IIT Madras



Anita Karwal
Ex-Education Secy



Amrit Lal Meena
Retired IAS officer



Potential Benefit

Stronger anti-paper leak system

Technology-driven exams

Faster punishment

Improved transparency

Long-term reforms

Impact

Fewer exam cancellations and re-examinations

Better security and reduced fraud

Deterrence against organised cheating networks

Greater trust in competitive examinations

More reliable recruitment and entrance examinations



Indian Monsoon: a democratic tipping point

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Above all, India must prepare for the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is not simply another technological revolution; it is the reshaping of our civilisation. Education, healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, communities, villages, cities, governance and employment. India possesses the raw young talent, entrepreneurial spirit, and digital foundation to become a global leader in AI for public good.

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

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

The idea of India Perhaps, the greatest challenge before India today is not economic or technological. It is philosophical – the idea of India rooted in our Constitution. That ideology needs to be the core of our development, and the prerequisite for a path to prosperity. For far too long has the world measured success primarily through the pursuit of power and profit. The time has come to rebalance our priorities: to place people and the planet at the centre of development. If we empower every young person, reduce inequality, strengthen democratic institutions, focus on humanity and not religion, and use technology to expand meaningful jobs by encouraging decentralisation, district-level development, entrepreneurship, innovation, and local manufacturing. It must also strengthen public healthcare, improve nutrition, low-cost housing, safety, security, schools, vocational training, invest in scientific research, reduce bureaucracy, and expand meaningful employment opportunities for every young Indian, regardless of their background.

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

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

A gamble on the Cauvery issue

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

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karthikeyan (TVK) Kashapam (TVK) president C. Joseph Vijay's decision to initiate talks with his Karnataka counterpart, N. S. Shivakumar on the Cauvery issue marks a departure from the State's traditional policy over the Cauvery dispute.

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

A new strategy Mr. Vijay's outreach has evoked disapproval from many political parties, farmers' leaders, and experts alike, as it directly negotiates over dialogue. It is possible that the TVK chief has thought of capitalising on his equidistance with Mr. Shivakumar and the Congress leadership to become a broker in the Cauvery problem.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ramakrishnan@gpethindia.co.in

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

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

DATA POINT

Sambhavi Parthasarathy

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

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

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

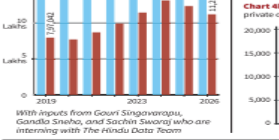
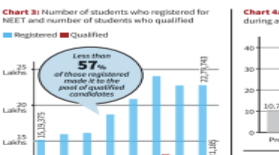
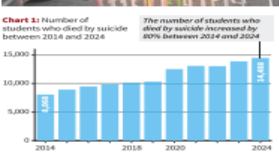
Over 1.23 lakh students ended their lives between 2014 and 2024 in the country (Chart D). The Ministry of Education stated in Parliament that suicides

among students are driven by various causes such as academic stress, family problems, mental health issues, financial distress and interpersonal conflicts. The ADSI reports capture 'failure in examination' as a significant category of reason for suicides. Suicides for which 'failure in examination' was the primary reason account for 45%, or more than one-fifth, of the total number of student suicides between 2014 and 2024. Over 2,000 students died every year due to failure in examinations, with 2021 being the only exception. Cumulatively, over 25,000 students died by suicide due to failure in exams between 2014 and 2024, of which 95% were under 18 years and another 42% between 18 and 30 years of age (Chart B).

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

Moreover, the need to join private coaching and the reality that many have to repeat the exam after studying for another year or two to qualify have contributed to significant costs for households. More than 35% of secondary and higher secondary students attend private coaching. In fact, households' private coaching expenses is about a third of their entire educational expenditure (Chart E). While the protests have come to an end, at least temporarily, these systemic problems await closure.

Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available on TeleMANAS 14406 and Suicidal prevention helpline 044-24640050



Under pressure

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

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

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The **Hindu**.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 27, 1976

'Roman letter' on Mars rock

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

But another experiment the seismology probe, appeared to be beyond the reach of earth-bound repairmen. Pictures from the Viking lander on Sunday showed a first lockpin lying on the Martian dust, that meant the probe seemed to have caused the jamming of the soil sampler's arm, had fallen away as planned.

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

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

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

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

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 27, 1926

Growing chaos in China

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

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

He says it is difficult to describe the intense feeling of pessimism reigning among all classes. China is in a state of helpless chaos and local tyranny is blasting any hope of extracting any part of the country from the welter of militarism and corruption. The situation can only be retrieved if the slackness of Europe is abandoned and a genuine attempt made by the Powers to act unitedly. The steady and impartial administration of the Customs under Sir Francis Aglen, enabling the collection of revenues, is the one bright spot in a gloomy pasture.



Under pressure

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

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

Chart 1: Number of students who died by suicide between 2014 and 2024

The number of students who died by suicide increased by 80% between 2014 and 2024

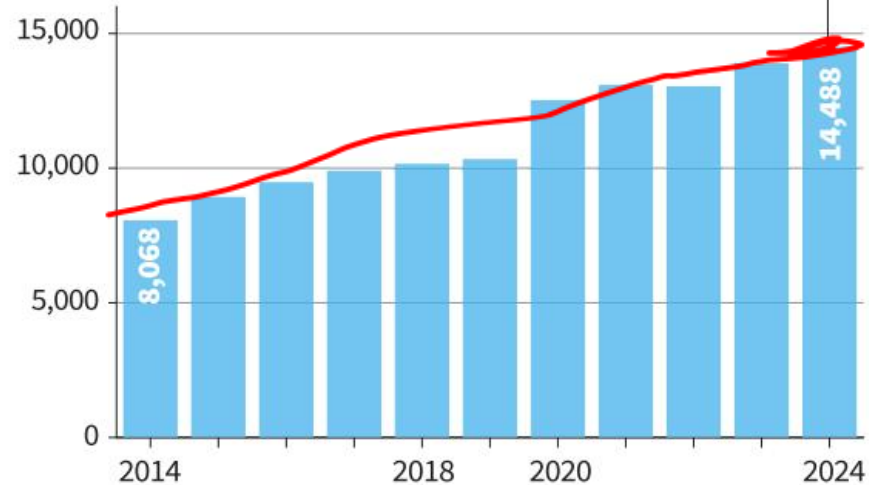


Chart 2: Age-wise split of persons who died by suicide due to 'Failure in Examination'

Below 18 18-30 Above 30

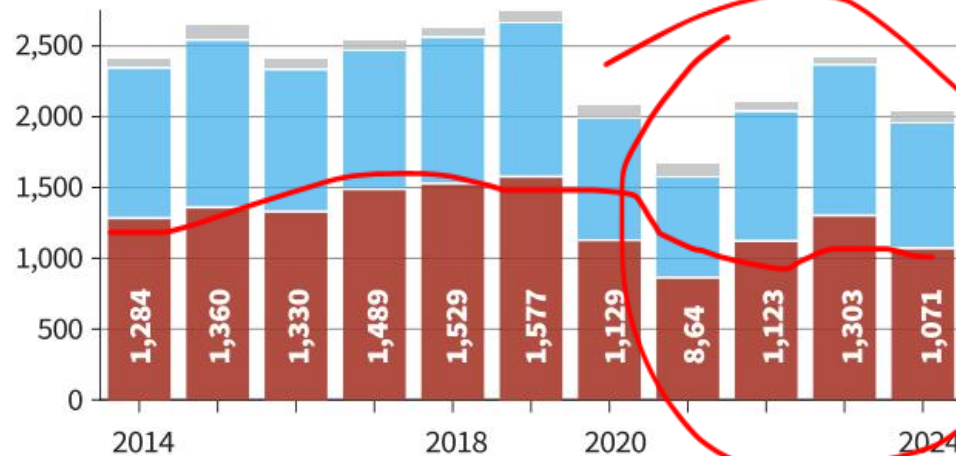
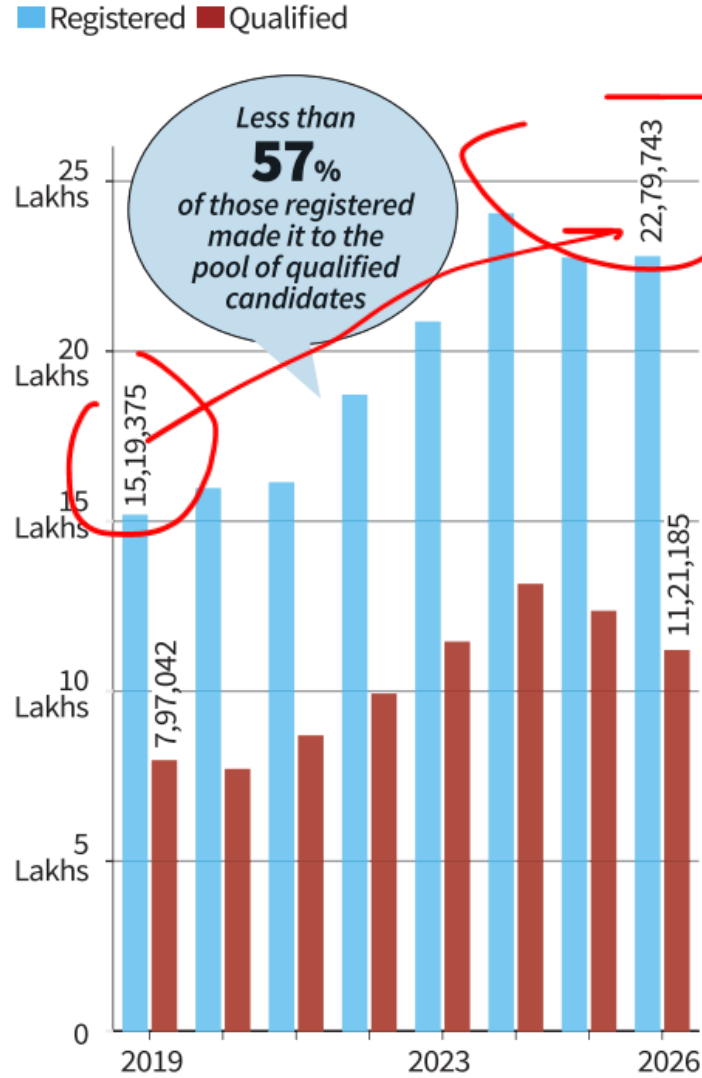


Chart 3: Number of students who registered for NEET and number of students who qualified



With inputs from Gauri Singavarapu, Gandla Sneha, and Sachin Swaraj who are interning with The Hindu Data Team

Chart 4a: Share of students (in %) who were taking/had taken private coaching during an academic year as per CMS:E 2025 at different levels of enrolment

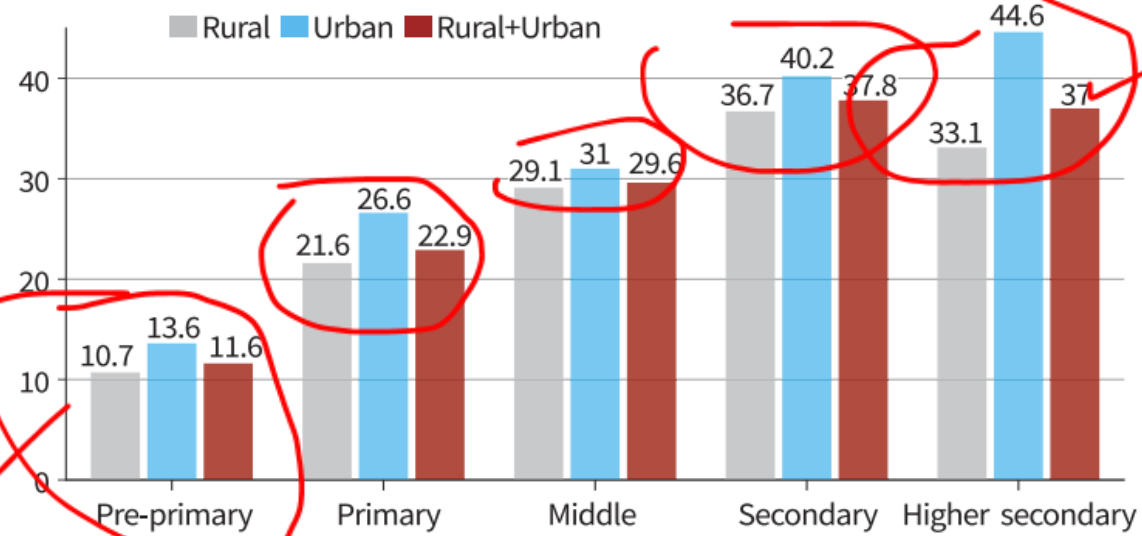
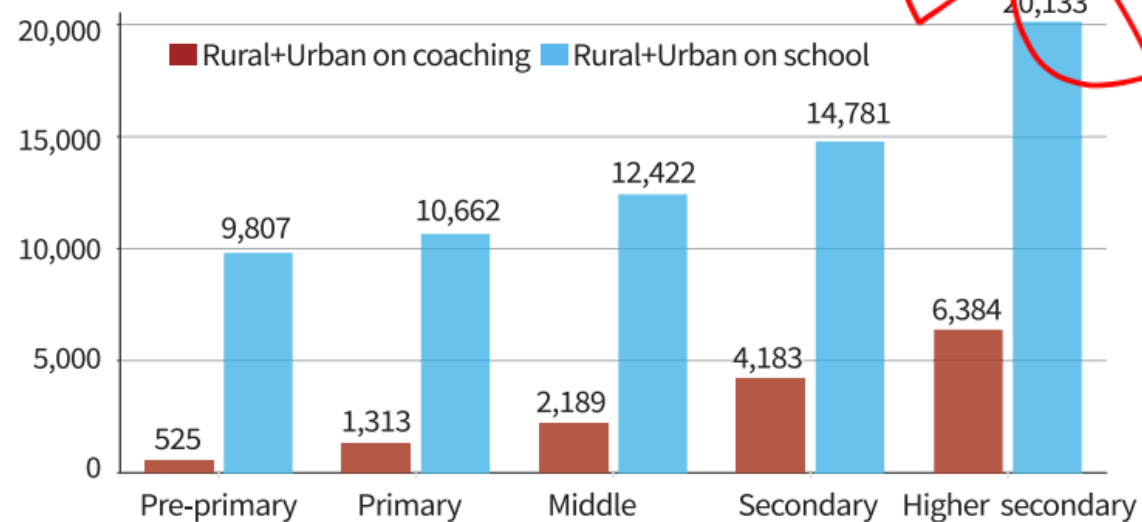


Chart 4b: Average expenditure (₹) per student on school education and private coaching by level of enrolment



Text & format

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of Delhi schools found with safety deficiencies

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

People still affected by the Assam flood situation

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

People evacuated in South China due to Typhoon Noul landfall

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

Number of people evacuated from the biggest forest fire

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

Maharashtra: share of SIR enumeration forms distributed

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

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Why is China's AI push gaining ground?

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

EXPLAINER

Arun Dasg

The story so far:

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

How is China positioning itself in AI?

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

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

How have they built a competitive ecosystem?

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

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



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

which has resulted in a multiplicity of models that have been downloaded millions of times from platforms like HuggingFace, with developers enthusiastically adopting these models for narrow, tailored use-cases. One of the most well-known entrants that challenged U.S. dominance is the startup DeepSeek, whose models are available online as well as on an open-source basis. The Chinese government has also acted to protect these firms from being co-opted into the U.S.-led AI ecosystem, such as by restricting travel for key personnel and blocking Facebook parent Meta's acquisition of the firm Manus.

What does this mean for the global race?
The difference between open-source and captive models — Anthropic and OpenAI's

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

This is so far a theoretical advantage, since the U.S.'s frontier firms are greatly subsidising their models; Anthropic is this month giving out \$400 in credits to paying users to use their Fable model. But once that exuberance dies down, the focus may very well shift to infrastructure providers, who may find open-source models an attractive offering.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

China's results are indicative of long-term planning at its government had set in motion for the AI ecosystem. The next major focus area, Mr. Jinping indicated in his speech, was AI "moving from the digital world into the physical world."

THE GIST

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

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

Why has India moved to take down BitChat repositories?

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

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

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

What is BitChat?

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

internet connection, no servers and no phone numbers.

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

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

What does the order say?

The order directs GitHub to disable access to three repositories, including the Android application and its release files, within three hours. It also warns that failure to comply

could invite criminal prosecution.

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

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

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

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

What does the law say?

The order, Notice No. H0726010H432, was issued at 11.16 a.m. on July 23 under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2008, read with Rule 30(4) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

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

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

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

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

Why is the order being criticised?

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

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

According to IFF, the notice, issued close to midnight, falls the proportionality standard laid down by the Supreme Court in *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* (2020). In *Anuradha Bhasin*, the Supreme Court held that "the degree of restriction and the scope of the same, both territorially and temporally, must stand in relation to what is actually necessary to combat an emergent situation." The court observed that the principle of proportionality requires restrictions to be tailored to the territorial extent of the restriction, the stage of the emergency, the nature of the urgency, the duration of the restrictive measure and the nature of the restriction.

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

What does the law say?

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

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The article explains why the **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C)**, under the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**, ordered **GitHub** to remove repositories hosting **BitChat**, a decentralized messaging application created by **Jack Dorsey** (co-founder of X/Twitter).

The government argues that BitChat could be **misused to evade surveillance, bypass internet shutdowns, coordinate unlawful activities, and threaten public order.**

The order has also sparked criticism from digital rights groups, who argue that **a technology cannot be banned merely because it has the potential to be misused.**

What is BitChat?

Feature	Details
Type	Decentralized peer-to-peer messaging application
Developer	Jack Dorsey
Technology	Bluetooth Mesh Network
Internet Required	✗ No
Server Required	✗ No
Phone Number Required	✗ No
Registration Required	✗ No
Cloud Storage	✗ No
Central Authority	✗ None

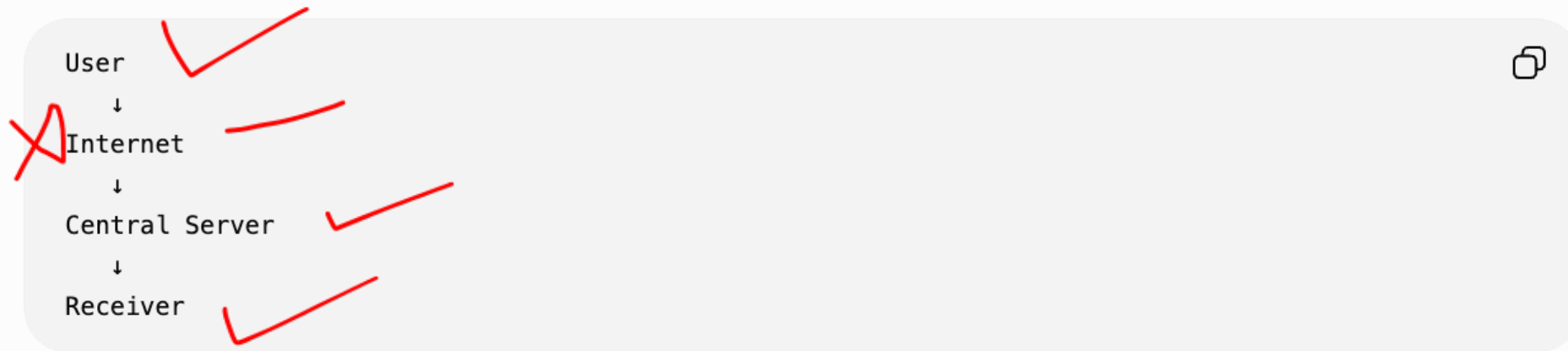
Instead, every nearby device becomes both a:

- Client
- Relay
- Router

Messages "hop" from one nearby device to another until they reach the destination.

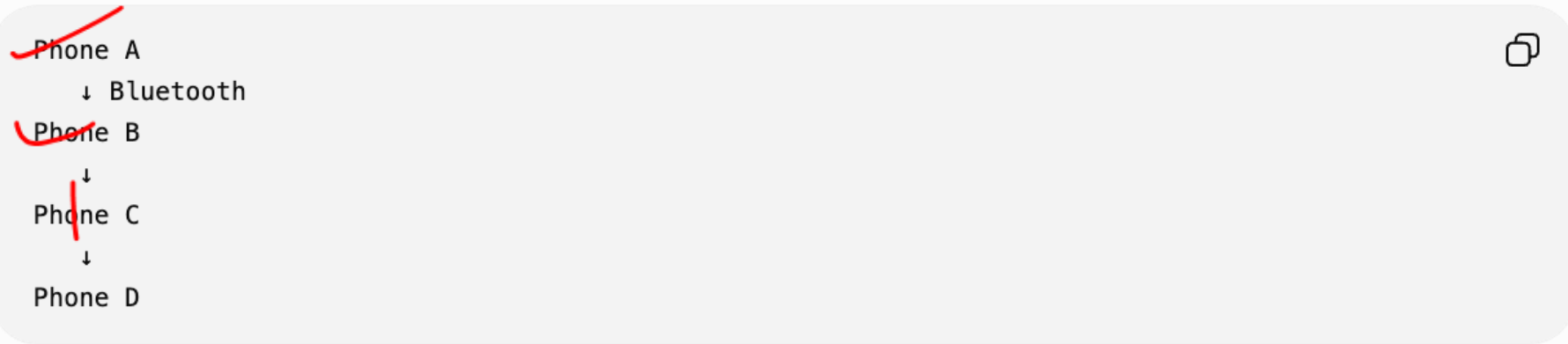
How does BitChat work?

Traditional Messaging Apps



If internet is blocked, communication stops.

BitChat



✓ No internet.

✓ No mobile network.

~~No server.~~

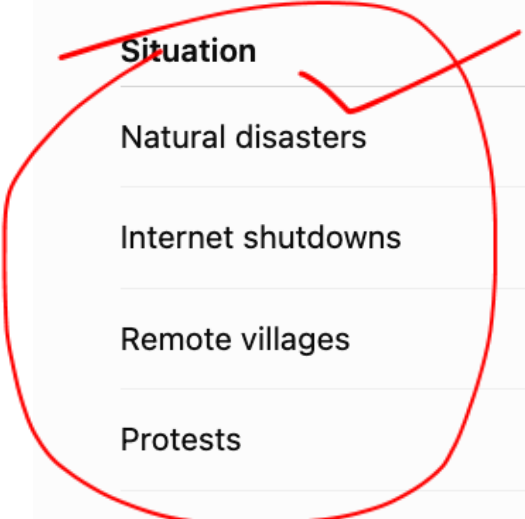
Each nearby phone extends the network.

This is called a **Bluetooth Mesh Network**.

Why was it developed?

According to BitChat's developers, the application aims to provide communication during situations where normal networks fail.

Examples include:



Situation	Benefit
Natural disasters	Communication without mobile towers
Internet shutdowns	Messages still work
Remote villages	No network required
Protests	Communication continues despite internet restrictions
Emergency rescue	Local communication remains available

The platform claims to offer:

- Censorship resistance
- Surveillance resistance
- Infrastructure independence

Why is India concerned?

The Ministry of Home Affairs believes the same features that make BitChat useful also make it difficult for law enforcement to investigate criminal activities.

Government's concerns

Concern	Explanation
Anonymous communication	Users need no identity verification
No phone number	Difficult to identify users
No server	No central authority to obtain records
No communication logs	Limited forensic evidence
End-to-end decentralized routing	Hard to intercept messages
Bluetooth mesh	Works even during internet shutdowns

According to the order, this architecture may:

- Prevent lawful interception
- Obstruct criminal investigations
- Enable anonymous coordination

✓ Possible misuse

✓ Unlawful assemblies

✓ Violent protests

✓ Terrorist activities

✓ Organized crime

✓ Radicalisation

✓ Criminal conspiracies

✓ Spread of misinformation

✓ Circumventing internet shutdowns

Reason

Secret communication

Difficult to monitor

Anonymous coordination

No central records

Hidden communication

Harder for police to investigate

Difficult to trace origin

Bluetooth works without internet

Why GitHub was ordered to act

The I4C directed GitHub to:

- Remove BitChat repositories
- Disable access to release files
- Act within **three hours**
- Preserve evidence while removing access

Bridge

Failure to comply could expose the intermediary to legal consequences.

What law was used?

The notice relies primarily on Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, along with the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Section 79(3)(b)

This provision states that an intermediary (such as GitHub) may lose its **safe harbour protection** if, after receiving actual knowledge or a lawful government notice, it fails to remove or disable access to unlawful content within its control.

Safe harbour generally protects online platforms from liability for user-generated content, provided they comply with legal obligations.

Does Section 79 itself allow blocking?

According to the article:

✓ No.

Section 79 concerns intermediary liability, not blocking powers.

Blocking public access is ordinarily done under:

- **Section 69A of the IT Act**
- **Information Technology (Blocking Rules), 2009**

These normally require:

- ✓
- Written reasons
 - Government review
 - A prescribed legal procedure
 - Opportunity for review in appropriate cases

Supreme Court judgment cited

The article refers to:

Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020)

The Supreme Court held that restrictions on communication must satisfy the principle of **proportionality**.

This means restrictions should consider:

- Territorial scope
- Duration
- Nature of the emergency
- Degree of necessity
- Whether a less restrictive alternative exists

The Court emphasised that emergency restrictions should be **no broader than required** to address the specific situation.

Government vs Critics

Government View

BitChat can facilitate unlawful activities

Difficult for police to investigate

Anonymous communication threatens security

Internet shutdowns can be bypassed

National security requires preventive action

Critics' View

Technology should not be banned because it can be misused

No unlawful content has been specifically identified

Privacy-enhancing technologies have legitimate uses

Circumventing shutdowns is not, by itself, unlawful

Any restrictions should follow proportionality and due process



• SCIENCE

This year's Fields Medal confirms China's rising maths prowess

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, July 26

TWO CHINESE mathematicians are among the four to have been awarded this year's Fields Medal, making it one of the rare occasions when more than one person from the same country is on the list.

The Fields Medal is the highest prize in mathematics, considered equivalent to the Nobel, only more selective. It is awarded once every four years, and those under 40 years are eligible.

This is the first time a Chinese national has won. Yu Deng and Hong Wang have been teaching at American universities, where most of their prize-winning work also happened, but they are Chinese nationals and products of Chinese universities.

The other two winners are John Pardon, a US national, and Jacob Tsimerman, a Soviet-born Canadian.

How China built an ecosystem

The Fields Medal has garnered special attention this year because of the two Chinese nationals on the list, both recognised for their role in resolving some long-standing puzzles in mathematics. It is being seen as a validation of China's consistent efforts to improve the quality of higher education and basic research in the last few decades.

China's emergence in science and technology has been noticeable for a while now. At least two of its universities consistently rank among the top 20 in the world and four or five feature in the top 50. Its expenditure on research and development (R&D) has grown from less than 1% of its GDP in 2000 to about 2.6% now. Considering that China's GDP

• SUSTAINED POLICY FOCUS

● China's expenditure on R&D grew from less than 1% of its GDP in 2000 to about 2.6% now. Its researcher base increased by over three times in 20 years.

● Its rise in AI can be attributed to its proficiency in mathematics. Foundational advancements in AI are rooted in maths.

has itself grown by over 10 times during this period, the investments have been massive.

According to the latest OECD Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook, China is now spending almost as much as the US on R&D in purchasing power parity terms. Its researcher base has increased by over three times in the last 20 years, and now stands at more than 2.28 million, the highest in the world. It is also one of the top

contributors of research papers in the most prestigious scientific journals.

But China is still largely absent from the world's greatest scientific laurels. It has had just three Nobel Prize winners in the sciences, but it is only a matter of time before this begins to change, and the Fields Medal wins could very well be the beginning of a dominance at such awards.

Both Deng and Wang are alumni of Beijing's Peking University, which consistently features in the world's top 20. It is among institutions that received sustained government support under elite education initiatives.

Maths mastery

The Fields Medal recognition might be new, but China's emerging talent in mathematics has been evident for quite some time now.

At the International Mathematical Olympiad, the world's toughest high-school level mathematics competition, China has won more team and individual gold medals than any other country. Since 2000, Chinese teams have secured the first rank all but eight times. They have never finished outside the top three since 1997.

China's rise in artificial intelligence could also be attributed to its proficiency in mathematics. Foundational advancements in AI are rooted in mathematical theories, and China's capabilities in AI are probably second only to the US.

A strong tradition of mathematics has existed in India, too, but it has yet to build a critical mass of leading mathematicians at its universities and institutions. Some of the best Indian mathematicians are working at institutions abroad. Two Indian-origin Indians have so far won the Fields Medal, Manjul Bhargava in 2014 and Akshay Venkatesh in 2018. Bhargava is Canadian-American and Venkatesh moved to Australia as a child.

The article discusses how the **2026 Fields Medal**, often called the "**Nobel Prize of Mathematics**," highlights China's emergence as a global leader in mathematics and scientific research.

For the **first time in history**, two Chinese mathematicians have won the Fields Medal in the same year, signalling decades of investment in mathematics, higher education, and research.

What is the Fields Medal?

Feature	Details
Award	Fields Medal
Field	Mathematics
Reputation	Highest honour in mathematics ("Nobel Prize of Mathematics")
Award Frequency	Every 4 years
Eligibility	Mathematicians under 40 years of age
First Awarded	1936

Unlike the Nobel Prize, the Fields Medal is awarded only once every four years and only to young mathematicians whose work is expected to shape the future of the discipline.

1936

19

2026 Fields Medal Winners

Winner	Nationality	Affiliation
Yu Deng	Chinese	University of Chicago
Wang Hong	Chinese	New York University (NYU)
John Pardon	American	University of California, Berkeley
Jacob Tsimerman	Canadian (born in Soviet Union)	University of Toronto

Key Milestone

- First time **two Chinese nationals** have won in the same year.
- Although Yu Deng and Wang Hong work at American universities, the article notes they are products of China's university ecosystem.

Why is this significant?

The article argues that the achievement reflects **China's long-term strategy of investing in fundamental sciences**, especially mathematics.

Rather than being a coincidence, it is presented as the result of sustained national investment over several decades.

How China Built Its Mathematics Ecosystem

1. Massive Investment in Research & Development

Indicator

Around 2000

Today

R&D expenditure (% of GDP)

Less than 1%

Around 2.6%

The article states that China has:

- Increased research spending dramatically.
- Made science and technology national priorities.
- Built a strong research ecosystem.

2. Rise of World-Class Universities

According to the article:

- Two Chinese universities are among the **world's Top 20**.
- Four Chinese universities are in the **Top 50** globally.

Government-backed initiatives have improved:

- Faculty recruitment
- Research infrastructure
- International collaborations
- Graduate education

3. Growth in Scientific Publications

The article notes that China now:

- Produces **the largest number of scientific papers** globally.
- Has one of the world's largest researcher bases.
- Competes directly with the United States in research output.

4. Large Research Workforce

According to OECD figures cited:

Indicator	China
Researchers	More than 2.28 million
Global Rank	Highest in the world

This large talent pool supports advances across mathematics, AI, engineering, and the sciences.

Why Mathematics Matters for AI

A major point made in the article is that **artificial intelligence depends on mathematics**.

Foundational areas include:

Mathematical Field	Role in AI
Linear Algebra	Neural networks, vectors, matrices
Calculus	Optimisation and training models
Probability	Machine learning and uncertainty
Statistics	Data analysis and prediction
Optimisation	Improving model performance
Graph Theory	Networks and relationships

The article argues that China's investment in mathematics has strengthened its AI capabilities.

600-700 X

Performance at the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO)

The article highlights China's long-standing success in the IMO.

Achievement	China
Gold medals since 2000	More than any other country
Team Ranking	Consistently among the best
Outside Top 3	Never since 1997 (according to the article)

This demonstrates a strong pipeline of mathematical talent from school level onwards.

Beijing's Education Strategy

The article points out that both Chinese Fields Medal winners studied at Peking University, one of China's leading institutions.

Government initiatives have:

- Strengthened research universities.
- Improved funding for STEM.
- Encouraged advanced mathematical research.
- Created pathways from undergraduate education to world-class research.

Comparison: China vs India

Aspect	China	India
Fields Medals (2026)	Two winners	None
R&D Spending	Around 2.6% of GDP	Lower than China
Research Investment	Sustained for decades	Growing but comparatively lower
Top Universities	Several in Top 50	Fewer in global Top 100
International Maths Olympiad	Dominant	Strong but less consistent

India's Mathematics Legacy

The article also recognises India's historical strengths.

India has produced renowned mathematicians such as:

- Srinivasa Ramanujan
- Harish-Chandra
- Manjul Bhargava (Fields Medal, 2014)
- Akshay Venkatesh (Fields Medal, 2018; Indian-born, later Australian)

It notes that while India has a rich mathematical tradition, many leading Indian-origin mathematicians have built their careers abroad.

Theme

Summary

Historic Achievement

First time two Chinese mathematicians have won the Fields Medal in the same year.

Long-Term Investment

China's success is linked to decades of sustained investment in education, research, and mathematics.

Mathematics and AI

Strong mathematical foundations underpin advances in artificial intelligence and other frontier technologies.

Research Ecosystem

High R&D spending, world-class universities, and a large researcher base have strengthened China's scientific output.

India

India retains a strong mathematical tradition but faces challenges in translating talent into a comparable domestic research ecosystem.

• CLIMATE

Why Assam is experiencing unprecedented flooding this year

Sukrita Baruah

Guwahati, July 26

AT LEAST 66 lives lost in around a week, close to seven lakh people affected, and the government struggling to reach thousands of people — Assam is in the grip of an unprecedented wave of floods.

The people who live in the three most affected districts — the Upper Assam districts of Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Jorhat — say they have never experienced such flooding in their lifetimes.

Extent of devastation

Floodwaters had reached critical levels on July 19 and began spreading rapidly. At the height of the floods, over 7 lakh people were affected and 1.15 lakh had moved to relief camps. With the floodwaters gradually receding, the total population affected has dropped slightly to 6.54 lakh across 810 villages in 10 districts on Saturday, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA).

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Friday that the government had been



Houses and villages submerged in Sivasagar, Assam. ANI

unable to reach parts of Sivasagar district even after water levels had come down. This, he said, was because of the receding floodwaters leaving behind layers of sediment several feet high.

Through the course of the week, the rivers Dikhow, Dhansiri, the Disang and the Janji and Darika — Brahmaputra tributaries that flow through this belt — have flowed above their “danger levels”.

Extreme weather events

The Assam government had initially at-

Rising trend

- High intensity rainfall events can cause damage and floods.
- Experts agree that with climate change, such events are becoming more frequent.

tributed the flooding to a “cloudburst” in Mon in Nagaland on July 19, which is upstream to these tributaries.

A scientist at the Meteorological Centre Kohima, however, told *The Indian Express* that the area had not experienced a cloudburst (defined as rainfall exceeding 100 mm within one hour) but rather heavy rainfall of 137 mm over 8 to 9 hours on that day. This had also triggered multiple landslides in Mon, leaving nine people dead.

Sarma said Friday that the rainfall received over the course of July 18 and 19 in three Nagaland districts and Assam’s Charaideo district was well over “normal levels”. He said the speed at which water levels rose because of this was “unprecedented”, and that the already swollen Brahmaputra hindered the drainage of tributaries into it.

Experts agree that with climate change, high intensity rainfall events of over 50 or 100 mm in one day, which cause damage and floods, are becoming more frequent, and will increase in coming years.

Combination of factors

Dhrubajyoti Sahariah, professor of

geography at Gauhati University who is studying the current wave of floods, said there has indeed been excessive rainfall.

“There is a mix of rainfall and anthropogenic factors. One contributing factor can be that in satellite images, we have seen excessive excavation on the river valley sides... likely because of mining. (This) would mean a large amount of mud flowing down, which reduces the river carrying capacity,” he said.

Nayan Sharma, retired professor from IIT Roorkee specialising in water resources and river engineering, said that deforestation is one of several contributing factors and “100% afforestation” was needed in watershed areas.

“If the ground is barren, the water doesn’t have enough time to percolate and it moves downhill very fast and carries a lot of silt. Which is what we’re seeing, with a rapid loss of forest cover. This excess silt then raises the river bed and reduces carrying capacity,” he said.

According to him, more effective forecasting using global precipitation monitoring systems would not make the scale of destruction “inevitable”.

The article explains that the devastating floods in Assam are **not caused by a single factor**, but by the combined impact of **extreme rainfall, climate change, the geography of the Brahmaputra basin, and human activities such as deforestation and mining.**

Scale of the Disaster

Parameter	Details
Deaths	At least 66 people lost their lives in about a week
People affected	Around 7 lakh initially; later about 6.54 lakh people remained affected
Villages affected	810 villages across 10 districts
Relief camps	About 1.15 lakh people moved to relief camps
Worst-hit districts ✓	Sivasagar, <u>Charaideo</u> and Jorhat
Major issue	Rescue teams struggled to reach many flooded areas

Residents of Upper Assam stated that they had **never witnessed flooding of this magnitude** in their lifetime.

Timeline of the Floods

Date	Event
✓ July 19	Floodwaters reached critical levels.
Following days	Water spread rapidly across Upper Assam.
Peak flood	Over 7 lakh people affected.
Later ✓	Water began receding but left behind severe destruction and thick sediment deposits.

Rivers Responsible

The floods were driven not only by the **Brahmaputra**, but also by several tributaries flowing above their danger levels.

River	Status
Dikhow	Above danger level
Dhansiri	Above danger level
Disang	Above danger level
Jhanji	Above danger level
Darika	Above danger level

Why Was the Flooding So Severe?

1. Extremely Heavy Rainfall

The immediate trigger was unusually intense rainfall in Nagaland and Assam.

Rainfall recorded

Area	Rainfall
Mon district (Nagaland)	137 mm over 8–9 hours

Although this did **not meet the meteorological definition of a cloudburst** (more than **100 mm in one hour**), it was still exceptionally heavy and caused:

- Flash floods
- Landslides
- Rapid runoff into Assam's river system

2. Climate Change

Experts cited in the article agree that **climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of heavy rainfall events**.

Rising Trend

Heavy rainfall events exceeding:

- 50 mm/day
- 100 mm/day

are becoming more common.

Climate change contributes by:

- Warmer air holding more moisture.
- More intense precipitation over short periods.
- Greater flood risk.

3. Swollen Brahmaputra Reduced Drainage

The Brahmaputra was already carrying a large volume of water.

When tributaries attempted to discharge into it:

- Water could not drain efficiently.
- River water backed up.
- Flooding spread across adjoining districts.

This is known as a **backwater effect**.

4. Excessive Sedimentation

Even after floodwaters receded, authorities reported thick layers of sediment left behind.

Sediment:

- Raises the riverbed.
- Reduces channel depth.
- Lowers the river's carrying capacity.
- Makes future floods more likely.

Human Activities Making Floods Worse

The article highlights several anthropogenic (human-caused) factors.

A. Mining and River Valley Excavation

Experts point to:

- Excessive excavation.
- Mining near river valleys.

Impact

- Large quantities of loose soil are washed into rivers.
- Rivers become heavily silted.
- Water-carrying capacity decreases.
- Floods intensify.

B. Deforestation

Loss of forests means:

- Rainwater is no longer absorbed effectively.
- Water flows rapidly downhill.
- More soil erosion occurs.
- More silt enters rivers.

The article notes that **watershed afforestation** is needed to reduce these impacts.

C. Soil Erosion

Without vegetation:

- Rainfall erodes exposed soil.
- Sediment is deposited in rivers.
- Riverbeds become shallower.



Main Contributing Factors

Natural Factors

Extreme rainfall

Climate change

Swollen Brahmaputra

Multiple tributaries in flood

Geographical vulnerability

Human Factors

Deforestation

Mining and river excavation

Excessive sedimentation

Reduced watershed protection

Reduced river carrying capacity

Suggested Solutions

Measure

Improved rainfall forecasting

Better global precipitation monitoring

Large-scale reforestation

Watershed management

Scientific river management

Regulation of mining

Purpose

Earlier warnings and evacuation

More accurate flood prediction

Reduce runoff and soil erosion

Improve groundwater infiltration

Reduce silt accumulation and improve flow

Prevent excessive sediment entering rivers



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● THE UNESCO COMMITTEE ALSO INSCRIBED ANCIENT JAPANESE CAPITALS OF ASUKA & FUJIWARA AND SOUTH SUDAN'S BOMA-BADINGILO MIGRATORY LANDSCAPE, HOST TO ONE OF WORLD'S LARGEST LAND MAMMAL MIGRATIONS

UNESCO adds France's D-Day landing beaches, Greece's Mount Olympus to Heritage List

Kim Tong-Hyung
Seoul, July 26

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

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

World Heritage List.

The French designation covers the five Normandy landing beaches — Omaha, Utah, Sword, Gold and Juno — where more than 150,000 Allied troops came ashore on June 6, 1944, along with the Pointe du Hoc assault site, all central to the campaign to liberate Western Europe from Nazi occupation during World War II.

International Council on Monuments and Sites, which evaluates submissions to the heritage committee, said the sites contain extensive remnants, from German fortifications and bomb-scarred landscapes to Allied harbor structures and sunken vessels,

marking an "event widely perceived as having enabled the return of freedom and heralded a lasting peace on the European continent."

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

Ahlem Gharbi, France's permanent delegate to UNESCO, said the Normandy landings marked a turning point from global conflict toward a post-war order built on peace and security, and that the designation of the sites carries added significance at a time of escalating



The Stefani Peak, known as the 'Throne of Zeus,' at sunrise on Mount Olympus; US infantrymen land at Normandy after the 1944 D-Day invasion of France. AP



international crises and wars.

"It's probably the greatest amphibious landing there's ever been. It ought to be remembered

for that alone," historian David Edgerton said in a recent interview with *The Associated Press*.

The World Heritage inscrip-

tion of Mount Olympus, the mythical home of the 12 Olympian gods, rewarded a 12-year effort by Greece to secure rec-

ognition for its tallest mountain as a mixed cultural and natural heritage site. Rising 2,918 meters (9,573 feet) from a base near sea level, the mountain was believed to be the throne of Zeus, king of the gods, while also harboring rich biodiversity

Evangelos Geroliolios, mayor of Dion-Olympus, a municipality at the foot of the mountain, said in a recent interview with the AP that inclusion on the World Heritage List "places greater obligations on our part to protect this environment," citing the potential impact of increased tourism.

"We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to safeguarding Mount Olympus for the

benefit of present and future generations," said Georgios Koumoutsakos, Greece's delegate to UNESCO. "As Greek mythology wisely reminds us, it is always best to remain on good terms with gods."

The designated Japanese locations in the western prefecture of Nara cover 19 archaeological sites from the 6th- to 8th-century capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara, where Japan established its first centralized state modeled after Chinese systems.

The sites preserve the largely buried remains of royal palaces, government offices, Buddhist temples and tombs from capitals that influenced the later capitals of Nara and Kyoto. AP

epaper.indianexpress.com

New Delhi

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

UNESCO adds France's D-Day Landing Beaches and Greece's Mount Olympus to the World Heritage List

The article reports that UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, meeting in **Busan, South Korea**, has added several culturally and naturally significant sites to the **UNESCO World Heritage List**, including:

- **France's Normandy D-Day Landing Beaches**
- **Greece's Mount Olympus**
- **Ancient Capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara (Japan)**
- **Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape (South Sudan)**

Newly Inscribed UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Country	Site	Type	Importance
France	Normandy D-Day Landing Beaches	Cultural	Site of the Allied invasion during World War II
Greece	Mount Olympus	Mixed (Cultural + Natural)	Mythological home of Zeus and biodiversity hotspot
Japan	Ancient Capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara	Cultural	Early Japanese state formation and Buddhist heritage
South Sudan	Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape	Natural	One of the world's largest land mammal migrations

1. France's D-Day Landing Beaches

Background

The beaches in **Normandy** were where Allied forces launched **Operation Overlord** on **6 June 1944 (D-Day)**, marking the beginning of the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi Germany.

Five Landing Beaches

Beach	Allied Force
Omaha	United States
Utah	United States
Gold	United Kingdom
Juno	Canada
Sword	United Kingdom

More than **150,000 Allied troops** landed on these beaches on a single day.

Why UNESCO Recognised It

The inscription covers:

- Landing beaches
- German fortifications
- Bomb-scarred landscapes
- Artificial Mulberry harbour remains
- Sunken military vessels
- Pointe du Hoc assault site

UNESCO recognised the area because it represents:

- A turning point in World War II
- The beginning of Europe's liberation
- An enduring symbol of peace after conflict

Concerns Raised by UNESCO Experts

ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) recommended stronger protection against:

Threat	Reason
Mass tourism	Damage to historic sites
Climate change	Coastal erosion and sea-level rise
Wind farm development	Potential impact on the landscape

2. Mount Olympus (Greece)

Why It Was Added

Mount Olympus received UNESCO recognition as a **Mixed Heritage Site**, meaning it has both:

- Cultural significance
- Natural significance

Natural Importance

Feature	Details
Height	2,918 metres (9,573 feet)
Highest mountain in Greece	Yes
Biodiversity	Rich ecosystem with rare plant and animal species

Cultural Importance

According to Greek mythology:

- Mount Olympus is the home of the **Twelve Olympian Gods**.
- It is regarded as the **throne of Zeus**, king of the gods.

This unique combination of mythology and ecology led to its UNESCO recognition.

3. Ancient Capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara (Japan)

Significance

The inscription includes **19 archaeological sites** dating from the **6th to 8th centuries**.

These sites preserve:

- Royal palaces
- Government offices
- Buddhist temples
- Royal tombs

Historical Importance

These capitals represent:

- Japan's first centralised state.
- The introduction and spread of Buddhism.
- Administrative systems influenced by China.
- Foundations for later capitals such as **Nara** and **Kyoto**.

4. South Sudan's Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape

Importance

This is South Sudan's first UNESCO World Heritage Site.

It protects one of the world's largest remaining land mammal migrations.

Wildlife

The landscape supports massive seasonal migrations of:

- Antelopes
- White-eared kob
- Tiang
- Mongalla gazelle
- Other large herbivores

Its recognition is expected to boost conservation and international attention to one of Africa's least disturbed ecosystems.

What is a UNESCO World Heritage Site?

Feature	Details
Managed by	UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)
Purpose	Protect sites of Outstanding Universal Value
Types	Cultural, Natural, Mixed
Benefits	International recognition, conservation support, tourism, funding opportunities

Word of the day

Aplomb:

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

Synonyms: calmness, composure, coolness

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

Pronunciation: newsth.live/aplomb

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /əplɒm/



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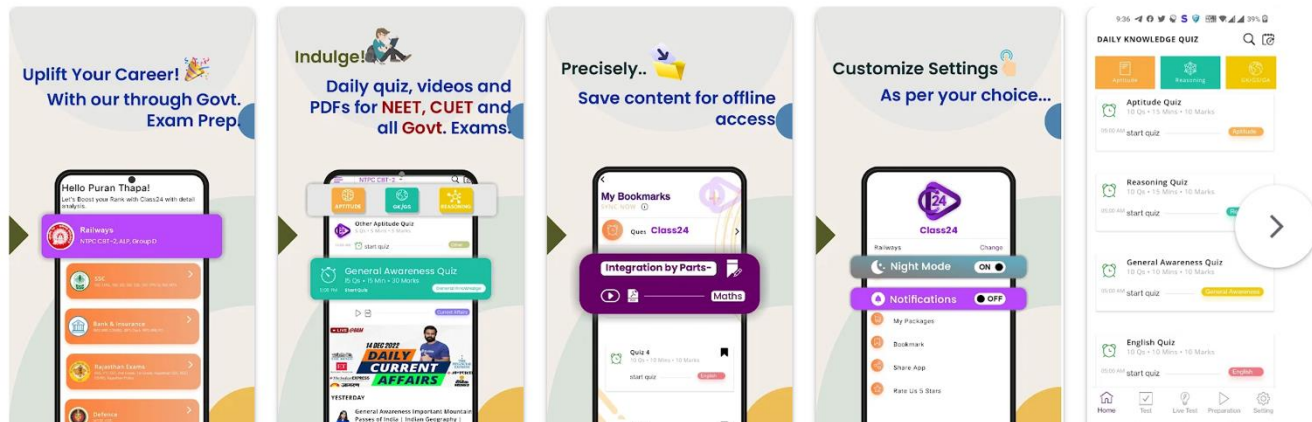
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