



THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

CHENNAI • SATURDAY • JULY 18, 2026 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 20 • LATE CITY EDITION

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15,000 fewer TN candidates clear NEET

SUBASHINI VIJAYAKUMAR
@ Chennai

THE number of candidates from Tamil Nadu who cleared the NEET-UG exam dropped by nearly 15,000 this year, according to data released by the National Testing Agency (NTA) on Thursday night. Only 61,306 students passed the exam in 2026, compared to 76,181 in 2025.

The drop was mainly due to low turnout for the re-examination. While over 95% of the 1,42,494 registered candidates took the original May 3 test, only 1,08,601 candidates showed up for the re-test. This caused the attendance rate to drop to 76.2%.

The May 3 examination was cancelled following allegations of a question paper leak, leading to the nationwide re-test on June 21.

P7

JPC seeks curbs on govt's powers in higher edu bill

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

AS the Centre is set to move the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025 for passage in the monsoon session of Parliament, a Joint Parliamentary Committee has sought safeguards against excessive centralisation and recommended stronger consultation with states, and protection of institutional autonomy.

According to the draft report circulated among members, the panel has recommended changes to key clauses that drew sharp criticism from multiple quarters, including NDA allies, for granting the Centre sweeping powers to override policy disagreements, supersede regulatory bodies, and control funding.

The Bill proposes an overhaul of the higher education



sector by dissolving the University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education, and the National Council for Teacher Education to create a single, unified regulatory commission.

While Clause 47 allows the Centre to supersede the Commission or any Council with Presidential approval, the panel recommended that 'supersession' should be invoked only in extraordinary circumstances, for a limited duration and as a last resort.

NDA-ruled Andhra Pradesh, several universities, opposition and other stakeholders have characterised the provision as "critical vulnerability" as it allows the Centre to dissolve the regulator entirely without adequate safeguards.

While Clause 45 empowers the Centre to issue binding directions on questions of policy, the panel called for objective thresholds, procedural safeguards and transparency requirements governing the Centre's power. It proposed adding the words "for the purposes of this Act" to the provision allowing the government to assign additional functions, to restrict its scope.

The panel also recommended that IITs and IIMs must be consulted before rules affecting their statutory autonomy are framed.

Big buzz on Pawar party joining NDA

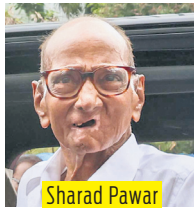
SUDHIR SURYWANSHI & RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ Mumbai/New Delhi

SPECULATION that Sharad Pawar's NCP(SP) is set to join the BJP-led NDA and merge with the Ajit Pawar faction intensified after senior NCP (SP) leader Jayant Patil held key meetings with BJP general secretary Vinod Tawade, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, and Deputy CM Eknath Shinde.

Shiv Sena minister Sanjay Shirsat claimed the picture would become clear within the next eight days. Highly placed sources said Sharad Pawar has personally entrusted Patil, his confidant, with negotiating the terms of NCP(SP)'s entry into the NDA and the merger of the two NCP factions.

Sources said Patil and Jitendra Ahwad could be inducted as cabinet ministers in Maharashtra, while Lok Sabha MP Supriya Sule and Rajya Sabha MP Praful Patel could be inducted as cabinet ministers at the Centre. However, Sunetra Pawar, wife of Ajit Pawar and NCP national president, has opposed the move fearing it would end her family's control over the party and jeopardise the political future of her sons, Parth and Jay.

The BJP, however, is not inclined to accommodate NCP (SP) separately in the Maharashtra government. Instead, it is pushing for a merger of the two NCP factions, a BJP source said.



Sharad Pawar

The BJP has given the green light (to the merger), but NCP national president Sunetra Pawar has raised the red flag, saying it will end their career

Top BJP leader

Finance remains thorn

A key factor delaying consensus within the NCP (Pawar) faction is its reported demand for the finance portfolio in the Maharashtra government, a department previously held by Ajit Pawar before it was taken over by Fadnavis following Pawar's death

India raps Japan leader's charges on bullet train

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA on Friday squarely rejected claims by former Japanese minister Hideki Makihara that New Delhi was responsible for delays in the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project, describing his remarks as a personal opinion that was "at considerable variance with facts" and asserting that the flagship India-Japan venture is progressing as planned.

Makihara had alleged in a social media post that India's handling of the Shinkansen project was marked by broken commitments and poor negotiations.

"The Shinkansen project in India is something I was involved with myself, but what stood out in international meetings and negotiations was the sheer recklessness of the Indian side, repeated over and over. They just don't keep promises."

He went on to criticise the Indian leadership overseeing the project, saying, "They keep pushing their own self-interest right up to the very end. The minister in charge was especially awful—if the top guy's like that, there's no way to have any decent dealings."

Responding to the remarks, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal dismissed them as unrepresentative of the bilateral engagement. "It is an individual opinion and at considerable variance with facts," he said.



Hideki Makihara

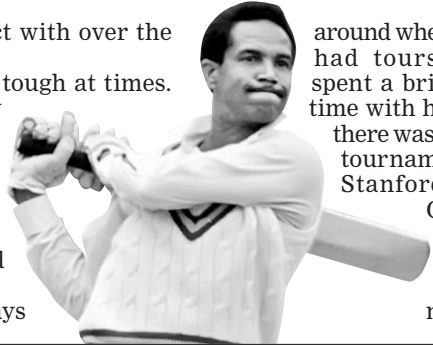
He left us but we'll have lots of good memories

MICHAEL HOLDING

IT is obviously a very sad day. We all know that no one lives forever. We all know these things are inevitable. But at the same time, when you have these occurrences, it shifts you a bit. It's not someone that is a distant past friend. It's someone that you have known for many years and still have some

sort of contact with over the years.

So it's a bit tough at times. No, I obviously didn't play with Sir Garry. He was before my time, but he was always around cricket. He was always



around whenever we had tours. I also spent a brief bit of time with him when there was the 20/20 tournament with Stanford in the Caribbean. I spent about 10 months

with him on that. But even so we had contact. I went out there trying to play as best as I can. I didn't think about Garry Sobers when I was out there. I couldn't match anything he did. He did a lot of great things for the West Indies. So he will be leaving us, but we'll have lots of good memories.

The writer is former WI great As told to Firoz Mirza

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