राष्ट्र रक्षा बहुश्रुती
FINS
Initiate interact influence
Forum For Integrated National Security
www.finsindia.org

THE BULLETIN

Volume: 7 Issue – 01 | Date: 1st August 2026

Beyond India's First Hydrogen Train: A Journey Towards a New Energy Era

By Uday Kumar Varma

Author is a former Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, GOI

India's first hydrogen-powered train is undoubtedly an engineering achievement. Yet its true significance lies not in the distance it travels but in the technological distance it represents.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off India's first indigenously developed hydrogen-powered train on the Jind-Sonipat section in Haryana, he inaugurated much more than a new railway service. The ten-coach train, powered by an indigenous hydrogen fuel-cell propulsion system, emits only water vapour and heat instead of smoke and carbon emissions. Running on an 89-kilometre route supported by the country's largest hydrogen storage and refuelling facility at Jind, it marks a significant milestone in India's clean-energy journey. More importantly, it invites us to look beyond the train itself and ask what the hydrogen economy could mean for India's future.

India's first hydrogen-powered train is undoubtedly an engineering achievement. Yet its true significance lies not in the distance it travels but in the technological distance it represents. It reflects India's growing determination to participate in shaping the next generation of energy technologies rather than merely importing them. Every major leap in civilisation has been accompanied by an energy revolution. The history of civilisation can also be read as the history of humanity's successive mastery over energy—from wood and wind to coal, oil, electricity and now, perhaps, hydrogen. Coal powered the Industrial Revolution. Petroleum transformed mobility, industry and geopolitics in the twentieth century. Electricity reshaped the modern economy. As the world grapples with climate change, energy security and the imperative of sustainable growth, green hydrogen is emerging as one of the most promising candidates to power the next chapter of industrial development.

Why Hydrogen Matters

Electricity is indispensable to modern life, but it cannot do everything. Batteries are rapidly transforming passenger vehicles and urban transport, yet sectors such as steel, fertilisers, shipping, aviation and long-distance freight require a clean energy source with characteristics that batteries alone cannot efficiently provide. Electricity may power our homes and cities; hydrogen may yet power the industries that build modern civilisation.

Produced by using renewable electricity to split water into hydrogen and oxygen, green hydrogen offers precisely such a possibility. In a fuel cell, hydrogen combines with oxygen to generate electricity, producing only water vapour and heat. It therefore holds the promise of decarbonising some of the most difficult sectors of the economy while reducing dependence on fossil fuels.

India's Window of Opportunity

India enters this emerging field with several important advantages. It possesses abundant sunshine, rapidly expanding renewable energy capacity and among the world's lowest solar power costs—the essential ingredients for producing affordable green hydrogen. The National Green Hydrogen Mission reflects a vision that extends well beyond reducing carbon emissions. It seeks to strengthen energy security, promote indigenous manufacturing of electrolysers and fuel cells, encourage scientific innovation, reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and position India as a significant producer of green hydrogen and green ammonia.

India also begins this journey from a position of industrial strength. Hydrogen is already widely used in petroleum refining and fertiliser production, providing an existing ecosystem into which green hydrogen can gradually be introduced. Equally significant is the fact that the propulsion system powering the new train has been designed and engineered by Indian talent. The importance of this achievement lies not merely in operating a hydrogen train but in creating intellectual property and technological capabilities that could eventually find markets beyond India's borders.

More Than a New Train

The new train can carry around 2,600 passengers across the Jind-Sonipat route at speeds of up to 75 kilometres an hour. Impressive though these specifications are, they are not what make the project strategically important. Indian Railways has already electrified almost its entire broad-gauge network, making conventional electric traction both economical and environmentally efficient. Hydrogen-powered trains are therefore likely to find their greatest value on heritage railways, mountain routes and isolated sections where electrification is technically difficult or economically impractical.

The train should therefore be seen less as the future of Indian Railways than as a public demonstration of technologies whose applications extend far beyond transportation—to industries that are considerably harder to decarbonise.

The Real Race

Around the world, countries are exploring hydrogen with both enthusiasm and caution. Germany pioneered hydrogen-powered passenger trains, while Japan, China and the United States continue to invest in research and pilot projects. Experience has also shown that hydrogen is not a universal solution. High production costs, storage challenges and expensive fuel-cell systems remain formidable obstacles, and in some applications battery-electric technologies may prove more economical.

India should therefore avoid both scepticism and hype. Hydrogen is neither a miracle fuel nor a technological fad. Its success will depend on identifying the sectors where it offers genuine technological and economic advantages. The real global competition is not simply about producing hydrogen. It is about mastering the technologies that make the hydrogen economy possible—advanced electrolysers, fuel cells, catalysts, specialised materials, storage systems and manufacturing capabilities. Nations that lead in these technologies will shape the industries of the future.

The Beginning of a Larger Journey

The train now running between Jind and Sonipat is more than another addition to India's vast railway network. It is a reminder that every technological revolution creates two kinds of nations—those that import the future and those that help invent it. For a country that missed the Industrial Revolution but later emerged as a global leader in information technology, the hydrogen economy presents another opportunity—not merely to participate in a technological revolution but to help shape it.

That ambition will be realised not by a single train but through sustained investment in scientific research, engineering excellence, advanced manufacturing, skilled human resources and innovation. The journey to a hydrogen economy will ultimately be decided not on the railway tracks but in laboratories, universities, factories and research centres. The train running through the plains of Haryana is simply its first public expression.

India's first hydrogen train is not the destination. It is the beginning of India's hydrogen journey.

Read complete article on website businessworld.in

Inside India's Secret Seychelles Mission: A Cold War Story

By - Vappala Balachandran

The author is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat GOI

Amid coup plots, CIA intrigue and mercenary raids, the Rajiv Gandhi government was asked to help secure a vulnerable island state.

In April 1986, Seychelles President France-Albert Rene made a special request to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during his visit to New Delhi: Depute a small team of Indian security officials to discreetly assess the existing security and police systems in his country.

This arose because of his doubts about his own security setup and since the entire Indian Ocean Islands were caught in the whirlpool of Cold War polemics. Consequently, this writer was chosen to lead a two-member team early in 1987. The other member was a senior Intelligence Bureau (IB) official.

Rene, a "leftist," had ousted James Mancham, the first "right-wing" president, from power in 1977, one year after the country's independence. Since then, Mancham was openly in cohorts with the Western and South African intelligence agencies to return to power through countercoup or elections.

Although Rene personally knew many foreign leaders like French President Francois Mitterrand or Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, there were reasons why he turned to India to do this sensitive work. He did not want to be caught in the Cold War crossfire. Also, France, which had guided Seychelles' security for long, had turned against it for geopolitical reasons, forcing Rene to temporarily turn to Tanzania and the Soviet Union to save his government.

Further, the May 13, 1978, coup in the Comoros orchestrated by a French mercenary named Bob Denard had successfully overthrown the leftist President Ali Soilih and had brought back former president Ahmed Abdallah, who was ousted in 1975. Ahmed Abdallah had then promptly restored his close ties with France and other Western countries.

Meanwhile, Mancham was using global media to highlight his comeback efforts. On May 24, 1983, he told The Observer in London that he had accepted GBP 12,000 from MI-6 for his election campaign. He also admitted that he had signed two agreements with the CIA, well before the Seychelles got independence in 1976, through which the Agency would set up an intelligence system to monitor his political opponents and to create a para-military unit in the Seychelles. The other agreement was to subsidise his weekly Seychelles News through the US embassy in Nairobi.

More light was thrown on Rene's predicament by a CIA assessment document ("The Mellowing of President Rene", October 1983), declassified only in 2008: In April 1979,

he had to hurriedly request the Soviet Union to send warships to show support during a suspected coup in the Seychelles. In November that year, the Soviet Union was again asked to send warships against a suspected French plot to oust him. During that period, Rene even arrested a French police adviser then working with him and deported him to France. The New York Times (December 23, 1979) identified him as Jacques Chevalereau.

The CIA paper also said that Rene detained a French military crew working in a Seychellois patrol boat "Topaz". The paper added that Rene's suspicions against the French involvement "were not totally groundless according to US Embassy reporting".

These destabilising efforts reached a nadir on November 25, 1981, when 43 South Africa-supported mercenaries called "The Froth Blowers" led by British-Irish Col. Thomas "Mad" Mike Hoare arrived at Mahe, Seychelles International Airport through Air Swaziland F-28 (Fokker) chartered aircraft. Their original idea was to enter the country like tourists and incite Rene's opponents to rise in revolt. This time India was unwittingly involved in this attempted coup.

Although Hoare's boys were dressed as tourists, a chance examination by a local customs official led to the discovery of AK-47 rifles in their baggage. Knowing that their game was up, the mercenaries took 70 airport staff hostages. They also took control of the airport control tower.

At that time a Boeing 707Air India flight 224 led by Captain Umesh Saxena from Salisbury (now Harare), which was going to Bombay with 64 passengers on board, was arriving at the Mahe airport for a scheduled refuelling. While Hoare's mercenaries allowed it to land, the local security forces assisted by Tanzanian soldiers did not want it to come down. A fire fight ensued which damaged the mercenary plane F-28 (Fokker).

Hoare's mercenaries realised that they could escape only through the Air India flight and tried to force Captain Saxena to take them to Zimbabwe. They finally agreed to travel to Durban due to shortage of fuel. At Durban, the mercenaries were arrested and later prosecuted.

It was in this background that we landed early in 1987 at the Mahe international airport near their capital city Victoria. We had expected the airport and capital city to be ringed by uniformed troops in view of the earlier coup attempts. Surprisingly, we did not notice any unusual police or armed forces deployment anywhere there or on our way to the hotel.

The next morning, when we were taken to the presidential palace to meet President Rene, we were again surprised to find that except for a ceremonial guard outside, the corridors of the palace were deserted. We were first taken to the President's secretary, who led us to Rene's modest office, where he gave us a briefing on what he was looking for.

He frankly told us that he could not trust his own security set-up due to "colour" divisions. He also told us that he was changing the white Commissioner of Police and appointing a "mulatto" officer who had better relations with the people, especially blacks. He wanted us to visit all the security establishments, including training institutes, assess their professionalism and give suggestions.

In addition, he openly told us that he would have to work with the Western nations to dispel the notion that he was merely following the Soviet bloc. Amazingly, the same assessment was made by the CIA document in 1983 saying that Rene was "showing a more positive attitude toward the major US interest in Seychelles-the USAF tracking station in Mahe".

We completed our assignment within one week and orally presented our findings to him, adding that we would send our written report through our Prime Minister's office.

The writer is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, who was part of the high-level committee to enquire into the 26/11 terror attacks

Read complete article on website indianexpress.com

Degrees Without Direction: Why India Needs Teachers Who Build Skills, Not Just CVs

By Dr. Santhosh Mathew

The author is a Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University, India. PhD Student, University of Mumbai & Project

"The true purpose of education is not to fill shelves with publications, but to fill society with capable, ethical and skilled citizens."

India is one of the youngest countries in the world. Every year millions of students graduate from colleges and universities with dreams of a better future. Many leave campuses carrying degrees, certificates and impressive academic transcripts. Unfortunately, a large number also carry something else—uncertainty. Recent estimates indicate that unemployment among graduates below the age of 25 remains alarmingly high, with around 40 percent struggling to find suitable employment. This is not simply an employment crisis. It is an education crisis.

The biggest challenge is not that India lacks universities. The country has thousands of higher educational institutions. The real question is whether these institutions are producing graduates with the knowledge, skills and confidence that employers and society need. For decades, higher education has increasingly measured success through publications, citations, impact factors, journal rankings and international academic databases. Research certainly has an essential place in universities. Scientific discoveries, technological innovations and rigorous scholarship are indispensable. The problem arises when these metrics become the primary measure of academic excellence, while teaching quality, public engagement and student outcomes receive much less attention.

In many universities, career advancement depends heavily on publishing research papers in indexed journals and academic books. Faculty members spend enormous amounts of time preparing articles for journals that are often read by only a handful of specialists. In some cases, publishing with international publishers involves substantial publication fees. While many reputable publishers and journals maintain rigorous standards and contribute valuable scholarship, there are also concerns about expensive publishing models and journals whose societal impact is limited. The real question is not where a paper is published but whether it contributes meaningfully to knowledge, public policy or social progress. Meanwhile, classrooms often receive less attention than they deserve. Students frequently complain that lectures rely on outdated notes, offer little interaction and provide few opportunities to develop practical skills. Employers repeatedly report that graduates lack communication abilities, analytical thinking, teamwork, digital competence and problem-solving skills. This widening gap between education and employability cannot be ignored.

The humanities and social sciences deserve particular attention. These disciplines help society understand politics, governance, economics, culture, ethics and human behaviour. Their value cannot be measured solely by citation counts. A political scientist who explains elections to ordinary citizens, an economist who helps local governments improve public services, or a historian who brings India's past alive through popular writing often contributes more directly to public understanding than a highly technical article that few people ever read. India needs more public intellectuals who can communicate complex ideas in clear language. The country has a rich tradition of scholars who wrote for ordinary people as well as academic audiences. Newspapers, magazines, public lectures, regional language publications and digital platforms should once again become important spaces where university teachers share their knowledge. A society benefits when scholars engage with citizens, not only with other scholars.

Teaching should become the central mission of universities once again. Outstanding teachers inspire curiosity, encourage innovation and prepare students for life beyond examinations. Their success should be measured not only by publications but also by student learning, graduate employability, mentoring, entrepreneurship, community engagement and contributions to public policy. India's National Education Policy already emphasizes multidisciplinary education, skill development, flexibility and experiential learning. These goals must be implemented with determination. Every university should integrate internships, industry collaboration, fieldwork, communication training, artificial intelligence, digital literacy and entrepreneurship into regular teaching. Students should graduate with both knowledge and practical competence.

Evaluation systems for faculty also deserve reform. Publications should remain an important component of academic assessment, but they should not dominate every promotion decision. Equal recognition should be given to excellent teaching, curriculum innovation, patents, policy reports, community service, popular books, newspaper articles, educational outreach and successful student mentoring. A balanced system would encourage academics to contribute in diverse and meaningful ways. India can also draw inspiration from its own intellectual traditions. The country's civilizational heritage has always linked knowledge with public welfare. Ancient centres of learning did not separate scholarship from society. Knowledge was expected to strengthen ethical leadership, good governance and social harmony. This broader philosophy reminds us that education should ultimately serve the nation and humanity, not merely institutional rankings.

International collaboration remains valuable. Universities should engage with scholars worldwide and participate in global research networks. At the same time, academic excellence should not be judged solely by foreign publishing labels or numerical indicators. India must develop greater confidence in evaluating scholarship by its originality, integrity, teaching quality and contribution to society.

Ultimately, India's unemployment challenge cannot be solved only by creating more jobs. It also requires producing graduates whose education matches the realities of the twenty-first century. Universities must prepare creators, innovators, entrepreneurs, researchers, teachers and responsible citizens—not merely degree holders.

When classrooms become centres of skill, creativity and character, unemployment will begin to decline. When teachers become mentors before becoming publication collectors, students will flourish. When universities measure success by the lives they transform rather than only the papers they produce, higher education will truly fulfil its national mission. "A nation rises not because its universities publish more papers, but because its universities produce citizens who can solve the problems of their time."

Youth Discontent, Democratic Protest and Eroding Institutional Trust: Assessing India's Education Reform Movement after 20 July 2026

By Sardar Sanjay Matkar

The author is a geopolitical analyst and former defence contractor with the US and intelligence professional with over four decades of operational and strategic experience across conflict zones and policy corridors worldwide.

Between 20 and 24 July 2026, the protests surrounding Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike evolved from a student-led campaign over examination integrity into a broader debate about governance, institutional credibility, and democratic participation. The movement expanded geographically despite police restrictions, while the Delhi High Court permitted Wangchuk's transfer to a private hospital following concerns raised by his family. At the same time, senior opposition leaders joined demonstrations, and the Government indicated a willingness to engage in dialogue through ministerial channels, although protesters argued that these discussions had yet to produce concrete commitments.

From a public policy perspective, the principal issue is no longer confined to examination administration. Instead, it concerns public confidence in institutions responsible for educational opportunity, the management of peaceful protest in a constitutional democracy, and the ability of government and civil society to resolve contentious disputes through dialogue rather than escalation.

I would like to argue that the current situation should be viewed primarily as a governance challenge rather than solely a law-and-order issue. International experience demonstrates that prolonged youth protests are most successfully resolved when governments combine credible institutional reforms with sustained public engagement, while protest leaders maintain non-violent discipline and articulate realistic, negotiable objectives.

Developments Since 20 July 2026

Reporting between 20 and 24 July indicates several significant developments.

The first was the continued expansion of the movement beyond Delhi. Credible media agencies reported that demonstrations spread to multiple Indian cities, reflecting broader concerns among students and young professionals regarding examination integrity and public accountability while the protest organisers continued to emphasise education reform and ministerial accountability as their principal demands.

Secondly, legal proceedings altered the immediate focus surrounding Sonam Wangchuk himself. On 21 July, the Delhi High Court allowed his transfer from Safdarjung Hospital to a private medical facility following a petition by his well-wishers. The authorities maintained that earlier medical intervention had followed judicial directions and medical advice, while Wangchuk's family characterised the circumstances differently. Both positions remain part of the public record and should be understood in that context.

Thirdly, the political dimension of the protests intensified. Opposition leaders publicly criticised the government's handling of demonstrations and sought to frame the issue as one concerning democratic accountability. At the same time, government representatives reportedly opened channels for dialogue with protest organisers, although no comprehensive agreement had been announced by 22 July.

Understanding the Growth of Youth Discontent

The rapid expansion of the movement cannot be explained solely by recent allegations concerning examination administration. Contemporary political research consistently suggests that large-scale youth mobilisation generally arises from the interaction of multiple factors of unrest that lead to that single event that triggers the protests.

Several themes emerge repeatedly in the currently available information from the public domain.

The first is concern regarding the credibility of competitive examinations. In a country where millions of students compete annually for a limited number of university places and public-sector positions, confidence in examination integrity carries exceptional importance.

Isolated failures can undermine trust across the broader system because educational outcomes are closely linked not only to future employment opportunities, but to the overall future success of the individuals themselves.

A second factor is the growing role of digital mobilisation. The Cockroach Janta Party has evolved from an online satirical movement into an organised nationwide campaign capable of mobilising large numbers of young people within a short period. This reflects wider international trends in digitally coordinated civic activism. The radical influence of the Western media and their political masters, especially from the USA & the UK, to foment unrest in India cannot be discounted. France and Germany are also playing their part in influencing the internal politics of India under the sad excuse of freedom of the press.

Thirdly, public perceptions appear increasingly influenced by questions of institutional responsiveness. Regardless of differing political preferences, prolonged public controversies often become more difficult to resolve when citizens perceive that dialogue has stalled due to ministerial ego (Refusal of the Education Minister to resign for incompetence) or that institutional responses are not transparent enough for the people to accept (delay in a response from the Prime Minister, which was scripted to be neutral).

Public administration experiences have long recognised that procedural legitimacy, “the belief that authorities are listening and acting fairly”, is often as important as substantive policy outcomes. Perceptions are important. Facts are often overlooked or ignored.

Assessing the Government's Response

Overall, there are differing assessments of the Government's handling of the protests. Supporters of the Government argue that authorities possess a constitutional responsibility to maintain public order and to intervene when an individual's health is seriously endangered. They further note that judicial oversight formed part of the decision-making process concerning Wangchuk's medical treatment. There is also a possibility that the growing crowd of angry and frustrated protestors might become violent.

Critics, mostly of foreign origin and several opposition leaders cited in international (western) reporting, contend that the policing of demonstrations was disproportionate and that greater emphasis should have been placed on sustained dialogue before the situation escalated.

From a purely public policy perspective, neither interpretation alone fully addresses the governance challenge. Democratic governments must simultaneously uphold public order, safeguard constitutional freedoms, and maintain public confidence. Success therefore depends not only on legal authority but also on transparent communication, procedural fairness, and visible institutional responsiveness.

A Path Towards Peaceful Resolution

Current evidence suggests several practical steps that could reduce tensions while strengthening democratic institutions.

The government must establish a formally constituted, time-bound independent commission to review examination governance and publicly report its findings; possibly through the appointment of an all-party parliamentary committee to examine systemic reforms in national entrance examinations and must maintain a structured dialogue with recognised representatives of the protest movement. It must publish regular updates regarding reform measures to improve transparency. The education minister must be removed from office, thus defusing the situation, even though it means an embarrassment for the government. This is no time for an ego fight from the Prime Minister and his colleagues. This effort is a must-have if the government wants to retain its credibility, which is fast eroding.

The leaders of the protest must continue to emphasise peaceful, constitutional methods of protest and articulate a prioritised set of achievable demands that can form the basis of negotiations. The key word here is achievable. Demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister is not an achievable goal. The protestors can use the democratic path of voting his party out of power in the next election, thus removing him from the PM position. They must discourage inflammatory rhetoric or actions that could increase public tensions and must participate in institutional consultations while preserving the movement's independence.

The role of civil society and academic institutions is equally important. They must facilitate evidence-based public discussions on examination reform; encourage independent monitoring of proposed reforms; and support mechanisms that rebuild public trust through transparency and accountability.

The events over the past few days illustrate how rapidly a policy dispute can evolve into a broader debate concerning democratic governance and institutional legitimacy. Although the immediate catalyst remains education reform, the wider public conversation increasingly concerns trust in public institutions and confidence that citizen grievances receive timely and meaningful attention from the elected officials and the government that represents the people of the country.

Experience from the past clearly suggests that prolonged confrontation does not produce durable solutions.

Sustainable outcomes generally emerge when governments demonstrate responsiveness through transparent institutional reform and when protest movements maintain non-violent discipline while engaging constructively in dialogue. Whether this present movement ultimately reshapes India's educational governance or fizzles out as just another incident that never makes it to the recorded history of politics will depend far less on the intensity of public demonstrations; than on the willingness of all stakeholders to convert public mobilisation into credible institutional reform.

Such an approach would strengthen the education system and also democratic resilience itself.

When Protest Turns into Mob Rule

By Praveen Dixit

The author is former Director General of Police, Maharashtra.

The NEET protests at Jantar Mantar highlighted a democratic paradox: the right to protest is fundamental, but so is the state's duty to restore order when violence erupts.

The resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan marked an unusually swift act of political accountability. It acknowledged the gravity of the NEET examination fiasco, a scandal that had shaken the confidence of millions of aspirants and their families. The government cancelled the tainted examination, arrested those accused of orchestrating the paper leak and conducted a fresh test. For many, these measures represented a serious attempt to repair a broken system.

Yet the controversy has not ended with the minister's departure. Instead, attention has shifted to the conduct of the Delhi Police during the violent clashes that erupted as protesters marched from Jantar Mantar towards Parliament. The dominant narrative in much of the public discourse has portrayed students as victims of excessive police force. That account deserves scrutiny because democracy rests not only on the right to dissent but also on the rule of law.

Legal Duty

The right to protest is fundamental. Equally fundamental is the state's obligation to ensure public order, particularly around institutions central to constitutional governance. Parliament is not merely another government building. It is among the country's most sensitive security zones, one that has itself been the target of terrorist attacks. Protecting it is not an optional responsibility entrusted to the police but their legal duty.

That context is frequently absent from discussions of the events of July 20. The protest, organised by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP), began as a demonstration against the NEET paper leak. The organisers were permitted to assemble at Jantar Mantar, Delhi's designated protest site. There was, therefore, no attempt by the authorities to suppress dissent. Protesters gathered, criticised the government and demanded the resignation of the Education Minister.

But instead of limiting themselves to the authorised venue or presenting a structured charter of reforms, the organisers announced a march towards Parliament on the opening day of the Monsoon Session. The area surrounding Parliament was already subject to prohibitory restrictions under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita because of obvious security considerations. Such restrictions do not permanently prohibit demonstrations. Groups regularly receive permission to march towards Parliament after disclosing the organisers, anticipated numbers, proposed route and intended programme. According to the police, no such permission existed for this mobilisation.

Governments are obliged to accommodate peaceful demonstrations. They are under no obligation to permit unauthorised crowds to advance towards one of the country's most heavily protected institutions.

Dubious Protestors

Another uncomfortable question has also received little attention: who exactly constituted the crowd? The organisers presented the gathering as a spontaneous mobilisation of aggrieved students. Yet little clarity exists about the composition of those present. Reports indicate that participants had arrived from several states, many mobilised through political networks rather than educational institutions. Distinguishing genuine students from political activists or professional agitators may be difficult in any mass protest. But that uncertainty is precisely why policing such demonstrations becomes so complicated.

A peaceful procession follows instructions, stops at designated barriers and allows a small delegation to submit demands. That is how democratic protest normally functions.

According to official accounts and video evidence released by the police, this march followed a different trajectory. Protesters allegedly attempted to breach barricades protecting Parliament, hurled stones at security personnel, vandalised police and private vehicles, attacked journalists, damaged nearby property, assaulted women police officers and even targeted a petrol pump. More than 150 police personnel reportedly suffered injuries, including officers from the constabulary to senior IPS ranks.

If these accounts are substantially correct, then the situation had ceased to be a peaceful demonstration. It had become a law-and-order emergency.

Police officers are not deployed merely to observe events unfold. They possess statutory powers precisely because governments cannot allow violent crowds to overwhelm public institutions. Once a gathering begins destroying property or attacking individuals, the police have not merely the authority but the obligation to intervene.

Critics argue that the police resorted to excessive force. That allegation deserves investigation wherever credible evidence exists.

Democracies cannot exempt law-enforcement agencies from accountability. But accountability must apply equally to those organising demonstrations. If protest leaders encourage confrontations, refuse lawful directions or incite attacks on security personnel, responsibility cannot rest solely with the police.

The sequence of force also deserves attention. According to official accounts, officers first appealed for calm, then issued repeated warnings before carrying out a limited lathi-charge aimed below the waist. Tear gas was deployed only after those measures failed to disperse the crowd. Such graduated escalation broadly corresponds with established crowd-control protocols used by police forces across democratic societies.

Subsequent claims have further muddied the debate. Allegations that pellet guns were used gained political traction after Opposition leaders displayed injured protesters before television cameras. Yet pellet guns, had they been used, would almost certainly have injured large numbers of people rather than isolated individuals. Police maintain that the injuries resulted from fragments generated by tear-gas shells rather than pellet ammunition. Likewise, viral claims that a young woman had died during the police action were later found to be false.

Emotional Narratives

These episodes illustrate a broader problem in the age of social media. Emotional narratives frequently outrun verified facts. Images circulate faster than investigations. Political incentives reward outrage rather than accuracy.

None of this absolves the government of responsibility for the circumstances that produced the protests. The NEET paper leak represented a profound institutional failure. Competitive examinations determine the futures of millions of young Indians. The anger generated by the scandal was legitimate, and accountability was necessary. The resignation of the Education Minister reflected precisely that recognition.

But accountability cannot become selective. If governments must answer for administrative failures, protest organisers must answer for violence committed under their banners. Democratic rights carry corresponding democratic responsibilities. The freedom to assemble does not include the freedom to assault police officers, vandalise public property or attempt to force entry into Parliament.

India's courts have repeatedly sought to balance these competing principles. The Supreme Court has consistently held that public roads cannot be occupied indefinitely in ways that infringe the rights of ordinary citizens. Protest is protected; disruption without limit is not. Ambulances, commuters and businesses possess rights too. Democracies succeed not because one right overwhelms every other, but because competing rights are reconciled through law.

Increasingly, sections of India's political class appear to romanticise direct street mobilisation as superior to parliamentary politics. Some activists openly argue that decisive political outcomes should emerge not from legislatures but from sustained public agitation. Such rhetoric may sound revolutionary. In practice, it risks legitimising a form of competitive street power in which the loudest crowd, rather than constitutional institutions, determines public policy.

That is a dangerous proposition regardless of which party governs. If violent pressure tactics become politically rewarding in Delhi, they will inevitably be replicated elsewhere - whether in Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra or any other state. Governments of every ideological persuasion would then confront the same dilemma: either enforce the law and face accusations of repression, or tolerate escalating disorder and watch constitutional authority erode.

Democracy cannot function if every contentious issue is settled through physical confrontation outside Parliament's gates. Nor can policing become impossible because every use of lawful force is automatically equated with brutality.

India certainly needs cleaner examinations, stronger institutions and greater governmental accountability. It also needs professional policing capable of distinguishing peaceful dissent from violent disorder. Weakening either pillar serves no one.

The challenge is not to choose between liberty and order. It is to preserve both. In a constitutional democracy, protest is a right. Violence is not. And asking the police to uphold that distinction is neither authoritarian nor anti-democratic; it is the very reason the institution exists.

Read complete article on website theperfectvoice.in

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of:

Irfan Ramzan Shaikh

Youngest Shaurya Chakra awardee at the age of 14 years





During the intervening night of October 16-17, 2017, three militants cordoned off the house of Mohd Ramzan Sheikh, a political activist in Shopian District of Jammu and Kashmir. His elder son Irfan, who was then 14-years-old, spotted the terrorists when he opened the door of his house. This horrific situation changed his life changed forever. Today, he is recognized throughout India as the youngest winner of the Shaurya Chakra Award. His story began in a small home in the Shopian part of Jammu and Kashmir back in 2019. That year, militants broke into Irfan's house. His father was gunned down, and he and his family were caught up in the midst of a sudden and violent attack.

He found himself surrounded by fear, with neither a gun nor the knowledge to use it. Yet he didn't shrink back, he acted.

People from that area who know the incident, says Irfan snatched a rifle from one of the attackers and then shot and killed one of the terrorists after aiming at them. This sight of a teenager fighting back shocked the attackers and caused them to run away.

Irfan saved his brothers and other relatives by acting quickly. His father, however, lost his life. This experience left a scar on the child, but his bravery received national news.

The Shaurya Chakra is one of the highest honours for gallantry in peace time awarded to persons of Indian origin. When Irfan was chosen for the award, he became the youngest person to receive the award. He received this award in 2019 given by then Hon'ble President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind

They observed that the case was unique due to the level of danger he was confronted with, as well as the level of sense he demonstrated at that tender age. Being unarmed, with attackers on all sides, he made a daring decision at his tender age of 14 years which changed the course of the event.

Many saw his experience as a reminder to them that sometimes the greatest acts of heroism can come from the most unexpected sources. In the town of Shopian, people look back on him not only as a heroic figure who stood up against the oppression, but also as one of the local youths who brought hope to the people living in the area, who were experiencing a tough time.

Although the medal now rests with pride, the impact of his father's loss remains in Irfan's life. However, the lesson that he taught in that instance will always be remembered as the courage of a kid in the face of terror.

Write to us at:
bulletin@finsindia.org

OFFICE: ***4, Belle View, Lakhamsi Nappu Road, Dadar (East), MUMBAI – 400014***
Phone: 98339 24371

EDITORIAL BOARD

Col (Dr) Ravindra Tripathi