Jharkhand HC stays State govt. order to cancel recruitments through JPSC exams

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

The Jharkhand High Court on Thursday stayed the State government order cancelling the appointment of employees recruited through the 11th to 13th Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) exams.

The government had issued a notification on August 18 cancelling 22 recruitment examinations, including the 11th to 13th JPSC examinations, after weeks of public protest over alleged irregularities.

After hearing arguments from all parties, the Bench of Justice Deepak Roshan stayed the decision to cancel the recruitments. The court also stayed an order cancelling the appointments of food safety officers. It asked the State government to furnish its reply by September 15, the next date of hearing.

Jharkhand High Court

During the hearing, Justice Roshan orally remarked that since the State government itself has ordered the Criminal Investigation Department to investigate the matter, no one can be removed from a permanent job without adhering to the principles of natural justice.

The petitioners' advocates, Kumar Harsh and Amritansh Vats, informed the court that neither an FIR nor any departmental action had been initiated in this matter. The court inquired whether there was any fact-finding report regarding the issue and asked if a regular appointment could be cancelled simply by issuing an order.

'Inconvenience'

The court also noted that numerous police officers and Deputy Collectors (serving as Magistrates) recruited through these examinations had been deployed to manage the Shravani Mela in Deoghar, and the sudden termination of their services was causing inconvenience to the general public.

The decision to cancel the JPSC results was challenged by Sonam Kumari and Deepmala, while the matter concerning the Food Safety Officer recruitment was challenged by Saurav Singh.

Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Babulal Marandi questioned the intentions of Chief Minister Hemant Soren's government following the High Court's stay on the government's decision to cancel the JPSC and food safety officer appointments.

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HC stays move to cancel JPSC recruitments

He said that he had predicted that the State government decision to cancel exams would not stand and could face a stay order from the High Court. Mr. Marandi alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Mr. Soren had orchestrated a spoof, cancelling exams as part of a calculated political conspiracy to quell the student agitation. The government had invited students for talks with legal experts and promised dialogue but subsequently reneged, issuing a decree behind closed doors to cancel the examinations.

NEET protest violence: SC forms probe committee

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has constituted a high-powered enquiry committee (HPEC), headed by former top court judge Justice R. Subhash Reddy, to probe issues and allegations, including those of police excesses against students, surrounding the nationwide protests against NEET-UG paper leaks.

Besides Justice Reddy, the panel will include Justice Ravi Shankar Jha, former Chief Justice of the Punjab and Haryana High Court; Justice Shalinder Kaur, former judge of Delhi High Court; Rishi Kumar Shukla, former Director of Central Bureau of Investigation; and L.R. Bishnoi, retired Director General of Police, Meghalaya.

SC form panel to probe NEET protest violence

The order said the inquiry undertaken by the panel should not be a "one-time exercise". "Rather, the committee shall undertake a continuous and periodic assessment of the issues enumerated in the order and shall submit its interim findings periodically so as to enable this court to take appropriate measures and issue such directions as may be warranted," it directed.

The Bench suggested the panel take up, on a priority basis, allegations of targeted violence, harassment, and molestation of female protesters. It was urged to assess the grievous harm and injury allegedly caused to protesters by police authorities and security personnel.

The court clarified that the constitution of the HPEC "shall in no way deter or debar the police authorities or other security forces from taking administrative or disciplinary action against such of their officers as may be found to be in contravention of the rules governing their conduct".

Rather than filtering the allegations and issues raised by the petitioners, the court listed each one of them in its order for the benefit of the panel.

The petitioners had also raised the question of what would be a "proportionate and measured police response" during protests, public gatherings, and peaceful assemblies. Clarifying this issue would help strike a balance between the maintenance of public order and the constitutional right to peaceful dissent.

The court pointed out to the panel that petitioners had sought a ban on metallic kinetic projectiles or pellets fired from pump-action rifles or projectile-action guns.

The court has also listed issues raised by respondents, including the alleged use of force and violence by protesters against police officials and other security personnel, the damage caused to public property on account of the actions of the protesters, and the destruction of vehicles, and other assets belonging to the State and private citizens alike.

Day after violence, Assam, Meghalaya CMs call for peace

Sarma and Sangma underscore need to explore ways to restore peace, trust, and normalcy; drivers' body blocks Shillong vehicles along border

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Chief Ministers of Assam and Meghalaya on Thursday sought restraint from the people of both States to recover from the impact of violence during a protest rally in Shillong on Wednesday.

Thirty-one vehicles, mostly Assam-registered, were damaged, at least a dozen people were assaulted, and some vehicles were torched during the bike rally organised by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU). The bikers wore black masks and covered the registration plates of their two-wheelers.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said he spoke to his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma regarding the violence and the reactions that followed, which affected common people and commuters in both States.

"We have agreed to work together, as always, to normalise the situation. Designated Cabinet Ministers from both States will meet to take the discussions forward and explore ways to restore peace, trust, and normalcy," Mr. Sangma said, appealing to the people of both States to maintain peace, harmony, and restraint.


Conrad K. Sangma


Himanta Biswa Sarma

"Meghalaya and Assam share deep bonds, and we must work together to protect them," he said.

Mr. Sarma said he conveyed Assam's concern over the recent incidents in Shillong to his Meghalaya counterpart. Insisting that deep historical, cultural, and people-to-people ties bind the two States, he said, "Mutual respect, restraint, and sensitivity must guide us at all times."

Meanwhile, vehicular movement between Guwahati and Shillong was disrupted on Thursday as Assam-based transporters responded peacefully to the violent students' rally.

Members of the Assam State Drivers' Association prevented the entry and exit of Meghalaya-registered vehicles, barring ambulances, along the arterial Guwahati-Shillong road at Jorabat on the border between the two States. Meghalaya police vehicles had to turn back too. The blockade followed the arrest of three leaders of the KSU in in connection with the violence. "We raided the KSU office and arrested three leaders of the group," Vivek Syiem, the East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police, said.

EoI seeking proposals to set up data centre project on Andaman and Nicobar Islands withdrawn

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration has withdrawn an Expression of Interest (EoI) seeking feasibility proposals for a private sector-led green AI data centre on the islands.

In a notice issued days after the EoI was published on August 10, the administration stated that it was withdrawing the EoI with immediate effect "due to administrative reasons".

The withdrawal comes even as *The Hindu* reported that the local Nicobarese population on the Great Nicobar Island had not been informed of any plans to set up a data centre in the sea areas around the island. The residents are already protesting against a proposed ₹91,000-crore mega infrastructure project.

Sea areas around Little Andaman and Great Nicobar Island had been identified for the project

The EoI had identified certain sea areas around Little Andaman and the Great Nicobar Island for the data centre project.

The administration is holding meetings with local tribal communities on the Great Nicobar Island over finalising the draft master plan released to the public earlier this year.

The draft master plan - meant to account for water, power, and connectivity infrastructure for the larger development project on the island - has no mention of a potential green AI/data centre vertical.

The sea areas identified to set up data centres are along the bays marked for development of one of two wildlife corridors (Gandhi Nagar Bay); agriculture, biodiversity tourism, and fish and poultry (Anderson Bay); coastal and business tourism activities (Vijay Nagar Bay); and residential pockets, and institutional and administrative buildings (Campbell Bay).

Amit Shah slams Congress's decision to render only two stanzas of *Vande Mataram*

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday launched a sharp attack on the Congress, alleging that its decision to render only the first two stanzas of *Vande Mataram* reflected appeasement politics, disrespected martyrs and undermined national unity.

In a statement to the media, Mr. Shah termed the Congress Working Committee's move on Wednesday to feature only the first two stanzas of *Vande Mataram* at party functions, in line with the All India Congress Committee resolution of 1937, as "anti-national".

"I want to remind the entire country that in 1937, the Congress party, for the sake of Muslim appeasement, split *Vande Mataram* into two pieces, laying the foundation for the country's Partition, and from there, the two-nation theory gained strength. Ultimately, the country was partitioned, and Pakistan was born," Mr. Shah said.

Amit Shah

The "historic mistake" was corrected in the 150th year of the emergence of the National Song by the Narendra Modi government, in an effort to "strengthen national integration by singing Bankim babu's (Bankim Chandra Chatterjee) immortal creation in full".

"For the sake of vote banks, they have not only disrespected Bankim babu's immortal creation but also insulted those millions of martyrs who went to the gallows for the country's freedom," he said.

The BJP said it would forcefully oppose the Congress's decision before the people as well as in the legislative Houses. "When, just a few days ago, this same insult had been exposed in the conduct of an individual, the Congress had dismissed it as a coincidence. Today, that very insult has become the Congress's policy," BJP president Nitin Nabin said on X, in a reference to a gesture by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi during a rendition of the song on August 15.

'BJP diverting attention'

The Congress hit back at Mr. Shah. The party's communication chief, Jairam Ramesh, termed BJP leaders as "fraudulent and fake nationalists" and accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Shah of diverting attention from their failures in dealing with the people's issues.

"This is politicisation of the issue. This is an emotional issue for the Congress but the Home Minister is looking to derive political benefit and use this to divert attention from his failures from real issues of the people," Mr. Ramesh said.

Matching Islamabad's action, Delhi brings down structures outside Pak High Commission

Unauthorised structures demolished outside the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, Thursday. PTI

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, August 20

IN A tit-for-tat move, some temporary structures and barricades outside the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi were removed on Wednesday, days after the Indian High Commission in Islamabad faced similar action.

According to sources in Delhi, the Pakistan authorities on Monday removed some barricades and structures that had been put up outside the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. These structures, including parking poles, had been put up to manage the queues of visitors and visa applicants,

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Pak High Commission

said sources. The Indian side had requested the Pakistan authorities not to remove these structures.

On Wednesday, the Indian side carried out similar action outside the Pakistan High Commission in the Capital's Chanakyapuri area. A section of unauthorised structures outside the Pakistan High Commission was demolished. A JCB machine was deployed to remove the structures and barricades erected along the lane outside the compound, including those for queue management near the visa section, sources said.

Visuals of the action showed that it left a trail of rubble outside the mission, with broken metal railings and gates, twisted metal frames, roofing sheets, bricks, and chunks of concrete and plaster strewn across the paved area. The visa section remained visible amid the debris. Broken fencing and construction material were seen lying around the counters.

This comes at a time when ties between India and Pakistan are at a low point, after Operation Sindoor in May last year, following the Pahalgam terror attack. Both the High Commissions have been functioning at the level of the Charge d'affaires for the last seven years, with reduced diplomatic strength and visa services mostly limited to pilgrims on both sides.

DHAKA

'Possibility of Tarique's India visit slim without dignified invitation'

AFP

The possibility of Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's visit to India next month for BRICS Summit "remains slim" unless an appropriate environment based on "mutual trust" is created, along with a "dignified invitation" from New Delhi, his Foreign Affairs Adviser Humaiun Kobir has said. PTI

Trump pledges 'economic warfare' on Iran, prompting Tehran derision

Any country providing 'any type of lifeline to Iran' would face 'tremendous economic consequences,' warns U.S. President; Iran dismisses the move as a continuation of 'failed policies', maintaining economic pressure by keeping Hormuz closed

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

U.S. President Donald Trump pledged "economic warfare" against Iran and threatened any country that trades with it, prompting Iran to dismiss the plan on Thursday as a continuation of failed policies.

The war between the two countries, started by the U.S. and Israel in February, appears stalemated, with peace talks stalled, Tehran keeping the key Strait of Hormuz shut and Washington persisting with a naval counter-blockade of Iran.

The U.S. Navy Nimitz-class aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* conducts a replenishment-at-sea on August 16. REUTERS

In a post on his Truth Social, the U.S. leader said he was announcing "the MOST CRUSHING ECONOMIC OPERATION EVER TAKEN AGAINST ANY COUNTRY! This will be Economic Warfare and Isolation on an unprecedented scale".

"ANY country that allows its financial institutions, businesses, airports, or government entities to provide any type of lifeline to Iran will itself face TREMENDOUS Economic Consequences," he said.

The U.S. has maintained punishing sanctions against Iran for decades, with Mr. Trump in his 2017-2021 first term ratcheting them up as part of a "maximum pressure" strategy in which he tore up a nuclear deal negotiated by his predecessor Barack Obama.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Thursday dismissed the plan as a continuation of "failed policies", which he said would bring Washington "further defeat".

"The so-called 'Economic D-Day' is a diversion from America's own crisis: unprecedented debt & surging interest costs. Doubling down on failed policies will only bring further defeat – and enmity of Iranians," Mr. Araghchi said in a post on X.

"U.S. economic terrorism threatens global economy and sovereignty worldwide."

Tehran, though, continues to exert its own economic pressure campaign by keeping the Strait of Hormuz largely closed.

BNP's Alamgir elected new President of Bangladesh

Press Trust of India
DHAKA

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, a long-time secretary general of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and a close ally of former premier Khaleda Zia, was on Thursday elected as the country's new President in the first contested poll for the post in 35 years.

The 78-year-old BNP stalwart defeated his lone rival Colonel (retd) Oli Ahmed, the 84-year-old Liberal Democratic Party chairman and the nominee of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party Opposition alliance, Chief Election Commissioner and also Election Returning Officer AMM Nasir Uddin announced after the counting of votes.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir

Of the total 349 registered voters, 343 voted in the election. Six lawmakers did not vote, he said.

Mr. Alamgir secured 255 votes while Mr. Oli Ahmad bagged 88 votes.

He will take the oath as Bangladesh's 23rd President on Friday evening at the Darbar Hall of Bangabhaban.

It is the first contested presidential election in Bangladesh since 1991, as the office had largely been filled through consensus and uncontested polls in recent decades.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman congratulated Mr. Alamgir on his victory in the presidential polls. Lawmakers also congratulated the President-elect by thumping their desks.

The presidential election was necessitated after Mohammed Shahabuddin, a close aide of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, resigned last month on health grounds before completing his five-year tenure.

Under the Constitution, a new President is required to be elected within 90 days of the office falling vacant.

Core sector growth slows to 5.4% in July as fertilizer, oil output falls

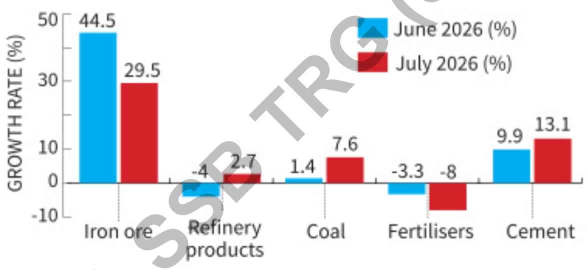
The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Economic activity in India's core industrial sectors saw growth slow to 5.4% in July 2026 from 6% in June, according to official data released on Thursday. This was driven by a significant slowdown in the fertilizers, iron ore, and steel sectors, accompanied by a continued contraction in the natural gas and crude oil sectors.

The data on the Index of Core Industries (ICE) released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, however, showed that July's growth was still the second-fastest in seven months. The Ministry released a new series of the ICE in July, which means that a historical comparison is possible only up to June 2025.

Sliding down

Core sector growth slowed to 5.4% in July 2026 compared with 6% in June. Iron ore, refinery products see biggest shifts



Within the index, the fertilizers sector contracted 8% in July 2026, as compared to a contraction of 3.3% in June. The sector had grown 1.9% in July of last year. This performance is likely due to the deficient and patchy monsoon, and the resultant lower levels of sowing taking place.

The iron ore sector saw growth slowing to 29.5% in July 2026, from 44.5% in June. However, it is important to point out that these relatively high growth levels are on a low base, since the sector contracted 16.4% and 7.1% in June and July of last year, respectively. This low base effect was also apparent in the coal sector's 11-month high growth rate of 7.6% in July 2026. The sector had contracted 12.3% in July last year.

Growth in the steel sector slowed to 2.9% in July 2026, the lowest in the 14 months for which there is data, down from 5.6% in June.

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Core sector growth slows to 5.4% in July

The natural gas and crude oil sectors continued their long streak of contractions. The natural gas sector contracted 3.7% in July 2026, while the crude oil sector contracted 5.3%. Both sectors have contracted continuously for the last 14 months for which there is data.

The refinery products sector, however, snapped a three-month streak of contractions by growing 2.7% in July 2026, the sector's best performance in nine months.

The two relative bright spots among the core sectors were the cement and electricity sectors. The electricity sector grew 9% in July 2026, albeit slower than the 11.4% seen in June. The cement sector saw growth hit 13.1% in July 2026, a seven-month high, from 11.1% growth in July last year.

NET OIL AND GAS IMPORTS IN APRIL-JULY STOOD AT $57.8 BILLION AGAINST $40.3 BILLION A YEAR AGO

Iran war pushes India's oil & gas import bill up 43%

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, August 20

AMID SUPPLY tightness and elevated prices due to the West Asia crisis and stifled energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz, India's net oil and gas imports surged by 43.4% in value from year-ago levels in the first four months of the current financial year, according to provisional data from the petroleum ministry. Net oil and gas imports — arrived at deducting petroleum product exports from oil, natural gas, and petroleum product imports — in April-July stood at $57.8 billion against $40.3 billion a year ago.

In volume terms, oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports were only marginally higher. As for petroleum product exports, the volumes declined, while export value rose. Petroleum product imports declined in volume as well as value, although the volume decline outpaced the fall in value, which is also reflective of high prices in the international market.

India depends on imports to meet over 88% of its crude oil requirement and about half of its consumption of natural gas, which is imported as LNG. Despite depending on imported oil and gas, India is a net exporter of petroleum products due to its massive refining capacity. The country also imports some petroleum products like liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

Around 40% of India's crude oil imports, 60% of its LNG imports, and 90% of its LPG imports came from West Asia through the strait. Apart from grappling with physical supply tightness due to the Strait of Hormuz crisis, the resultant surge in international prices forced India to import oil and gas at extremely high rates, as the country has been prioritising supply security over price considerations.

The country's crude oil import bill surged by over 56% on a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis in April-July to $63.4 billion, even as import volumes rose slightly to 81.9 million tonnes — or about 600 million barrels — from 81.5 million tonnes, as per data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC).

This translates to an average landed price of about $106 per barrel for imported crude in April-July, sharply higher than about $68 per barrel in the corresponding period of last year. The data shows that India's dependence on imported oil for the four months ended July was 88.3%, almost flat on a y-o-y basis.

As for LNG imports, while supplies rose slightly — to 11,867 million standard cubic metres (mscm) in April-July from 11,269 mscm a year ago — the import bill rose by almost a fourth to $5.6 billion, reflecting the spurt in prices.

Petroleum product imports declined 45.1% in volume terms to 9.0 million tonnes, as supply of major petroleum products that India imports — like LPG — were impacted by the West Asia conflict. In value terms, the decline in petroleum product imports was relatively lower — down 26.3% to $5.6 billion — due to high international prices.

India's petroleum product export volumes fell almost 18% y-o-y to 16.5 million tonnes in April-July as domestic fuel supplies were prioritised amid the global supply crunch. Nonetheless, exports surged almost 35% in value.

Energy imports are a major component of India's overall imports, and any meaningful increase has ramifications for the country's trade balance, current account, inflation, and the rupee's exchange rate, among others. As India annually imports 1.8-2 billion barrels of oil, every $1-per-barrel increase in oil prices bumps up the country's oil import bill by up to $2 billion on an annualised basis.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• Impact of war on energy imports

	Apr-Jul FY26	Apr-Jul FY27	Change
Oil imports (mn tn)	81.5	81.9	0.5%
Oil imports ($ bn)	40.5	63.4	56.5%
Petroleum pdt imports (mn tn)	16.4	9	-45.1%
Petroleum pdt imports ($ bn)	7.6	5.6	-26.3%
LNG imports (mscm)	11269	11867	5.3%
LNG imports ($ bn)	4.5	5.6	24.4%
Petroleum pdt exports (mn tn)	20.1	16.5	-17.9%
Petroleum pdt exports ($ bn)	12.4	16.7	34.7%
Net oil & gas imports ($ bn)	40.3	57.8	43.4%

SOURCE: PETROLEUM PLANNING AND ANALYSIS CELL (PPAC)

Buffalo meat exports boom: Read the message

INDIA'S BUFFALO meat exports are booming, hitting a record \$5.1 billion in 2025-26 and set to cross \$6 billion in the current fiscal year. Credit goes to the industry that has built a market in countries from Southeast and West Asia to Africa and, more recently, Uzbekistan, Russia and Georgia. Moreover, unit value realisations have gone up from sub-\$3,000 to \$4,000-plus per tonne over the last two-three years, amid concerted efforts at raising the product profile of Indian buffalo meat, and not selling it as just a cheaper alternative to regular cattle beef. This has been helped by adherence to internationally recognised quality and hygiene standards and exports being allowed only through government-approved abattoirs and processing plants.

But equally important is how the buffalo meat industry has been complementary to India's dairy sector. The buffaloes that are culled are mostly animals not giving enough milk or those that happen to be male. For farmers, the fodder, feed, water and labour that go towards maintaining them has a direct as well as an opportunity cost — in terms of the loss of potential output from not allocating the same resources to more productive bovines. By creating a market for unproductive buffaloes, the meat plants have enabled farmers to replace low-yielding/ageing animals with high-milking/fresh stock. Such regular herd turnover is essential for any viable dairy enterprise. The very fact that the buffaloes going to the slaughterhouse aren't competing for scarce resources with the ones giving milk makes this a more sustainable model. Unlike in Brazil or the US, where cattle are reared separately for milk and beef, here the meat is from "spent" buffaloes that have outlived their usefulness as milkers.

Consumption of milk, especially high-fat, is growing in India on the back of rising incomes. The support to buffalo milk production from meat exports is, therefore, welcome. But buffalo milk yields are lower compared to that from crossbred cows. Their age at first lactation and inter-calving intervals is also longer. To that extent, buffaloes alone cannot supply India's increasing milk requirement from a medium-to-long-term perspective. All the more reason why a scientific approach to culling unproductive animals — whether for breeding and reproductive efficiency or redirecting finite resources to higher-yielding stock — is necessary in cattle, too. The political leadership cannot run away from taking that call.

High Court Bench for Ladakh approved

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has decided to establish a High Court Bench in Ladakh, a move aimed at improving access to justice in the Union Territory, Home Minister Amit Shah said on Thursday, reaffirming the Centre's commitment to ensuring constitutional safeguards and the all-round development of the region.

Ladakh Lt.-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena welcomed the "historic decision" and expressed sincere gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Home Minister.

The announcement comes against the backdrop of continuing discussions over the political, administrative and constitutional future of Ladakh, with local stakeholders seeking stronger safeguards.