

RISKS AND REWARDS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON JALLIKATTU DEATHS

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The deaths of five men in Tamil Nadu in as many events of jallikattu and manjuviratu — in [Madurai](#), [Tiruchi](#), Sivaganga, Pudukottai and Karur districts — and injuries to dozens of persons this week, though unfortunate, are no surprise. Ever since the event resumed in January 2017 after a three-year ban and a massive agitation, participants and spectators alike have been its victims. According to the Animal Welfare Board of India, between 2008-14, there have been 43 deaths and thousands of injuries. As of now, zero human casualty remains an elusive goal, not to speak of the plight of the animal. The Supreme Court of India has reserved its judgment on a batch of petitions questioning the validity of the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(Tamil Nadu Amendment\) Act of 2017](#). Organisers of jallikattu events must note the observation made in late November by the Constitution Bench, which heard arguments over the amendment, that the sport of jallikattu as such might not be brutal but the “form” in which it was being held in the State might be cruel. Proponents of jallikattu, who view the event as a sport, argue that the logic that is applied to football or boxing, where the probability of injury is high, should be extended to jallikattu too. Also, just as the occurrence of mishaps does not trigger the demand for a ban on these two sporting activities, the same yardstick should hold good for jallikattu, which is also [justified in the name of culture, tradition and valour](#). But, what is overlooked is that in football or boxing, or even car racing, the whole game centres around humans, unlike in jallikattu.

At the same time, regulation and safety are being given greater importance. It is comforting that the authorities have tightened the rules. In Madurai district, which has 21 venues, an online registration system allowed bull owners to choose only one out of the three high-profile venues — Avaniapuram, Palamedu and Alanganallur. In Tiruchi, no more than 700 bulls can be released at each event. Of course, elaborate guidelines were issued by the State Animal Husbandry, Dairying, Fishing and Fishermen Welfare Department in late December, on the duties and responsibilities for each stakeholder. Though fairly extensive, the rules should also have stringent penal provisions. The authorities should focus on preventing deaths, at least among spectators, who should be behind impregnable barricades. Also, the government should end the practice of having fancy prizes, such as cars and motorcycles, to draw in youth. After all, jallikattu was originally meant to showcase strength and valour, and the rewards should not be seen as an incentive to overlook the risks to life and limb.

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