



Judicial Commission Terms 1993 Police Firing Unjustified, Recommends Fresh Legal Action

“Worse than the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.”

Kolkata, July 21: A judicial commission probing the July 21, 1993 police firing on a political demonstration in Kolkata has concluded that the use of lethal force by police was unnecessary, with its report being tabled in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly ahead of the incident’s 33rd anniversary. The report of the Justice Sushanta Chatterjee Commission examined the police action during a Youth Congress rally that was marching towards the Writers’ Building, then the state secretariat. The firing claimed the lives of 13 protesters and left several others injured. The commission reportedly found that the crowd did not pose an immediate threat to the administrative headquarters and that the apprehension of an attack on the building was unfounded. It described the police action as “unnecessary, provocative and unjustified.”



According to the commission’s findings, police personnel resorted to firing without adequate justification despite the demonstrators being at a distance from the Writers’ Building. The report also held several senior police officials responsible for the handling of security arrangements during the protest and criticised the excessive use of

force. During the Assembly session, the state government said families of those killed and people injured in the firing would be allowed to submit fresh police complaints based on the commission’s findings to pursue legal remedies. It also announced that compensation would be provided in line with the panel’s rec-

ommendations, including ₹25 lakh for the families of those killed and ₹5 lakh for those injured. The commission was constituted in 2011 to investigate the incident and submitted its report in 2024. The report was formally placed before the Assembly before being made public, in keeping with legislative procedure.

Hill Groups Oppose Bengali Language Mandate, Seek Exemption for Darjeeling Region

Kolkata, July 21: The West Bengal government’s decision to make Bengali mandatory for official administrative work has triggered opposition from political parties, community organisations and civil society groups in the Darjeeling hills, with leaders demanding a clear exemption for the region citing its distinct linguistic and cultural identity. Representatives from the hill districts argued that Nepali, which is included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, holds a significant place in the social and administrative life of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. They said the region has historically used Nepali and English for official communication and any move to impose a single-language administrative framework could affect the linguistic rights of local communities. Political organisations and civil society groups maintained that the language policy must consider the unique demographic composition of the hills, where multiple



communities with different linguistic backgrounds coexist. They warned that compulsory use of Bengali in government correspondence, notices and administrative procedures could create practical difficulties for residents who primarily communicate in Nepali or other regional languages. Several hill-based organisations have urged the state government to issue a formal clarification stating that Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts would remain outside the scope of the directive. They argued that existing provisions recognising regional languages in the hills should be protected and that administrative communication should continue in a manner accessible

to local residents. Leaders also expressed concern that any unilateral implementation of the policy without consultations with local stakeholders could reopen long-standing political and cultural issues in the mountain region. They appealed to the state government to hold discussions with elected representatives, community bodies and language organisations before enforcing the directive. The groups emphasised that preserving linguistic diversity was essential to maintaining the cultural identity of the hills. They said language policies should promote inclusiveness rather than create divisions among communities. The state government has indicated that provisions would be made for areas where other languages have official recognition. However, hill leaders have called for a specific written exemption for Darjeeling and Kalimpong to remove uncertainty and ensure that existing linguistic practices remain protected.

Language Policy Bengal Makes Bengali Mandatory for Official Government Work

Kolkata, July 21: The West Bengal government has announced that Bengali will become mandatory for all official government work and communications across the state from September 1, with the move aimed at promoting the wider use of the state’s official language in administration. The announcement was made by Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari in the Legislative Assembly, where he said all state government departments, public sector undertakings, local bodies and administrative offices would conduct official work in Bengali. The directive covers file processing, note sheets, government orders, official correspondence, citizen services and public communications. Under the new policy, Bengali will also be used across digital governance platforms, including gov-



ernment websites, online portals, mobile applications, application forms, certificates, training materials, press releases and public signage. The government said translators and other logistical support would be provided during the transition to ensure smooth implementation.

The Chief Minister said official correspondence with the Union government and other states would continue to be carried out in both Bengali and Hindi wherever required, while stressing that Bengali would remain the primary language for state administration. Senior officials

have been instructed to monitor compliance across departments and administrative units. The government said the initiative is intended to strengthen the use of Bengali in governance while making official communication more accessible to citizens across the state.

Bengal Considers Stake Sales in Utilities

Kolkata, July 21: The West Bengal government is exploring measures to boost non-tax revenue, including the possibility of selling minority stakes in select state-owned public utility enterprises and monetising government-owned commercial assets, as it seeks to strengthen its finances amid rising expenditure on welfare schemes and infrastructure projects. The proposals were discussed during a high-level financial review, where officials examined ways to generate additional resources without increasing the state’s debt burden. As part of the exercise, departments have been asked to assess the feasibility of partial equity dilution in selected public sector undertakings, particularly those operating in the power distribution and municipal utility sectors. Officials believe that strategic stake sales could help mobilise significant capital for infrastructure development and other priority sectors while allowing the government to retain management control over the enterprises. The review also focused on improving returns from government-owned assets. Departments have been directed to prepare a comprehensive inventory of state-owned land parcels, commercial buildings and other underutilised properties to identify opportunities for long-term leasing, redevelopment or other forms of monetisation. According to officials, optimising non-operational assets could provide a steady stream of non-tax revenue and reduce pressure on the state’s finances. The exercise is also expected to improve asset management, enhance the productive use of public property and support long-term fiscal sustainability. The proposals are part of the government’s broader efforts to strengthen revenue mobilisation while maintaining expenditure on welfare programmes, public services and development initiatives. Any decision on stake sales or asset monetisation will be taken after detailed financial and legal assessments.

Malda Legislator Warns Public Against Fraudsters Using His Name

Malda, July 21: A Malda legislator has issued a public alert after reports surfaced that unidentified individuals were allegedly misusing his name and claiming links with his office to deceive residents through fraudulent calls and messages seeking money in exchange for government assistance and employment opportunities. The warning was issued after several local residents reportedly approached the legislator’s office with complaints about suspicious communications from people posing as representatives of his team. The alleged fraudsters reportedly contacted citizens through phone calls and digital platforms, claiming that they could arrange government benefits, speed up administrative approvals, provide job opportunities or influence official processes in exchange for payments. The legislator clarified



that neither he nor any authorised member of his office demands money from citizens for public services, government-related assistance or employment-related matters. He stated that his office works only through official channels and urged residents not to trust individuals making financial demands in his name. The lawmaker appealed to people to remain cautious while dealing with

unknown callers and online contacts claiming to have political or administrative connections. Residents were advised not to share sensitive personal information, bank details, documents or transfer money to anyone promising government jobs, schemes or special assistance. The incident has raised concerns over the growing use of digital platforms by fraudsters to impersonate public representatives and

exploit people’s trust. Officials said such scams often target individuals seeking help with government services by creating a false impression of influence and access. Following the complaints, police authorities began a preliminary inquiry into the matter and started examining the phone numbers, social media accounts and other digital platforms allegedly used by the accused persons. In-

vestigators are also collecting details from residents who received suspicious communications to trace the source of the fraudulent activities. Police officials have urged citizens to immediately report similar incidents and avoid engaging with unknown persons making unofficial offers related to jobs, government schemes or administrative favours. Authorities said strict action would be taken against those found involved in identity misuse and financial fraud. The legislator’s office also appealed to residents to verify any communication claiming to represent him or his staff and rely only on officially confirmed information for accessing public services. The office reiterated that assistance to citizens would continue through legitimate administrative channels without any financial charges.

Man Arrested in Kolkata Over Alleged Sexual Assault of Minor

Kolkata, July 21: A 40-year-old man has been arrested by police in connection with the alleged sexual assault of a minor in the northern outskirts of Kolkata, after the victim’s family lodged a complaint with the authorities. Police officials said the investigation began after the family reported the alleged incident and submitted a formal complaint. Acting on the information received, a police team initiated an inquiry, collected preliminary details and launched a search operation to locate the accused. The suspect was later traced and apprehended from a hideout in the area by a team of investigators. Police officials said the accused was taken into custody and questioned as part of the initial investigation before being produced before



a local court. The accused has been booked under relevant provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and other applicable sections of law. The court subsequently sent him to judicial custody, allowing investigators to continue their probe and gather additional evidence related to the case. During the investigation, police are examining statements from the victim’s family and other individuals connected with the mat-

ter. Officials said medical examinations and forensic procedures are being conducted as part of the evidence collection process, which will assist investigators in preparing the charge sheet. Police officials said the investigation is ongoing and further legal action will be taken based on the evidence collected. Authorities have assured that all necessary procedures under child protection laws are being followed while handling the case. The incident has once again highlighted the importance of timely reporting and swift legal action in cases involving crimes against children. Law enforcement agencies have urged citizens to immediately approach the authorities in case of any suspected offence involving minors.

Asansol Station Falls Silent on July 21

Slogan Clash at Durgapur Station

Asansol: In a striking departure from a decades-old tradition, Asansol Railway Station witnessed none of its usual political rush on July 21, the day when thousands of Trinamool Congress (TMC) supporters traditionally gathered to travel to Kolkata for the party's Martyrs' Day rally. In previous years, Platform No. 7 and other parts of the station would be packed with party workers from across West Burdwan district carrying flags, banners and raising slogans before boarding trains.

The station premises would remain crowded from early morning. This year, however, the scene was markedly different. A visit to the station on Tuesday morning found no significant gathering of TMC workers, no party flags, banners or slogans, and no visible rush of rally-bound passengers.

The platforms and station concourse were occupied only by regular commuters, with train operations continuing as on any ordinary day. The unprecedented absence of the

Durgapur: Tension briefly flared at Durgapur Railway Station on Tuesday after Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Congress workers exchanged slogans as Congress supporters were leaving for Kolkata to participate in a Martyrs' Day programme at Shahid Minar. Congress leaders alleged that BJP supporters attempted to prevent their workers from boarding the train and claimed that some party members were assaulted during the confrontation.

Eyewitnesses said the tension began with slogan-shouting by both



sides, leading to a heated verbal exchange. Although the atmosphere remained tense for some time, no major untoward incident was reported. Police later reached the spot, after

the BJP government was "afraid of the Congress" and claimed that "former Trinamool Congress goons are now working for the BJP" and had tried to stop Congress supporters from travelling to Kolkata. The BJP, however, rejected the allegations. A party leader claimed that BJP workers were distributing drinking water and biscuits to passengers travelling to Kolkata and alleged that several former Trinamool Congress workers were now carrying Congress flags. Police have not yet issued an official statement on the incident.

High Court Extends Abhishek Relief, Denies Travel

Kolkata: The high court on Monday extended till October 6 its earlier order restraining police from taking coercive action against Trinamool MP Abhishek Banerjee in connection with a case linked to his remark on blaring DJ music. The court, however, declined to grant his plea to travel abroad for eye treatment. Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya disposed of Abhishek's application seeking permission to travel, observing that a board of senior doctors at SSKM Hospital could be constituted for his treatment. Appearing for Abhishek, his lawyer said the MP had cooperated with the investigation, pointing to his appearance before a Bidhannagar court last week to provide a voice sample. The lawyer argued that Abhishek had been travelling abroad for treatment for several years and sought permission for him to continue doing so. He also requested an extension of protection from coercive action, citing his client's cooperation with investigators. While extending the protection, the judge said that previous treatment abroad did not mean similar treatment was unavailable in Bengal.

Congress Alleges Obstruction at Durgapur Station; BJP Denies Charge

Durgapur: Tension briefly prevailed at Durgapur Railway Station on Tuesday after Congress workers alleged that BJP supporters tried to prevent them from travelling to Kolkata to attend a July 21 programme. West Burdwan District Congress President Debesh Chakraborty claimed that Congress workers were stopped at the station entrance and were told they would not be allowed to proceed. He further alleged that a scuffle broke out when party workers



attempted to board the train. The BJP, however, categorically denied the allegations. BJP Mandal No.

3 President Tej Narayan Pandey said party workers had been present at the station since morning with drinking water and biscuits to assist passengers travelling by train. "We were standing at the station only to distribute water and biscuits to passengers before they boarded their trains. The allegations of obstruction are completely baseless," Pandey said. No official statement had been issued by the police regarding the incident at the time of filing this report.

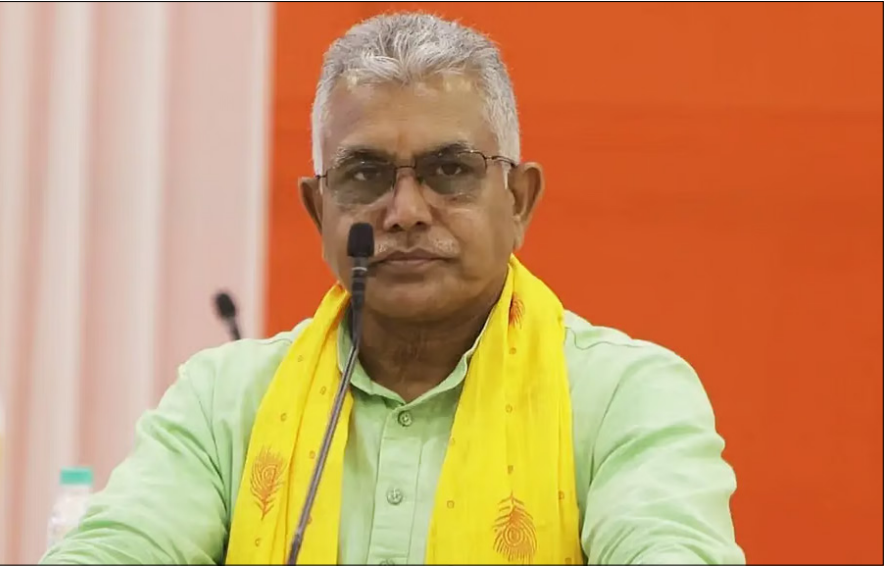
MLA Warns Against Misuse of His Name

Durgapur: Durgapur West BJP MLA Lakshman Chandra Ghorui has warned of strict action against individuals allegedly collecting money by misusing his name. Speaking in Durgapur, the legislator said he had received complaints that some people were attempting to extort money by claiming links with him. He urged the public not to fall prey to such individuals and advised anyone approached for money in his name to immediately lodge an FIR with the police. "I have also received a complaint regarding such activities. I, too, will approach the police and file a complaint," Ghorui said. The BJP MLA reiterated that no one is authorised to collect money on his behalf and cautioned that le-



gal action would be initiated against anyone found misusing his name for personal gain.

Dilip Warns That Missing Panchayat Chiefs Will Be Caught By Using Police



Kolkata: "Following the publication of the assembly election results, heads of several Trinamool-run gram panchayats across various districts are not even coming to the office to sign documents. Consequently, problems are arising in implementing various projects. Under these circumstances,

Panchayat Minister Dilip Ghosh warned that the vanished gram panchayat heads would be tracked down and brought in using the police." "Delivering his reply during the discussion on the budget of the Panchayat and Rural Development Department in

the Assembly on Monday, Dilip said, 'If a panchayat chief cannot provide services to the people, then they should resign. We are saying we will provide police protection, yet the chiefs are not coming to office. Projects cannot be implemented. This is a conspiracy. If this contin-

ues, I will have the police rope them around the waist and bring them in.'" "Dilip had earlier announced that the state government intends to amend the Panchayat Act to transfer financial powers from gram panchayat chiefs to the panchayat secretary. However, until this law is enacted, if a panchayat chief fails to attend office, the execution of numerous initiatives—ranging from the 125-day work scheme to rural road construction—remains stalled. Consequently, Dilip stated, 'If financial authority lies with the panchayat secretary and they fail to perform, I can suspend them and deduct their salary.'" "However, MLA Samir Jana and Sabina Yasmin from Trinamool's rebel faction sought to argue that the panchayat chiefs are feeling insecure due to the fear of being attacked."

MLA Leads Drive Against Alleged Encroachment

Durgapur: An alleged illegal septic tank built on government land was demolished in Durgapur's Benachity area on Tuesday as a civic anti-encroachment drive gathered pace, with Durgapur West BJP MLA Lakshman Ghorui personally overseeing the operation. According to local residents, a private residential complex in Natun Pally had constructed a septic tank and boundary wall on government land, obstructing public space. Following complaints, the MLA directed the Durgapur Municipal Corporation to initiate action. A JCB excavator of the civic body was deployed to demolish the alleged encroachment. Ghorui was present at the site during the operation. The BJP legislator alleged that the encroachment had



been carried out with the support of leaders of the previous Trinamool Congress regime. He warned that if the housing authorities failed to remove the remaining encroached portion voluntarily and restore the land, they would face stricter action and higher financial liability. "We had

raised the issue before the Sub-Divisional Officer, the District Magistrate and officials of the Durgapur Municipal Corporation. A committee constituted by the District Magistrate identified the illegal constructions. Following its findings, demolition has begun," Ghorui said. He

added that similar action would be taken against all illegal encroachments on government land across Durgapur. Officials of the residential complex were not immediately available for comment, and their response to the allegations could not be independently verified.

Sujoy Remanded Back to Police Custody Over Casteist Harassment Allegations

Purulia: "In another case, the court remanded Sujoy Bandyopadhyay, the Vice President of the Purulia Zilla Parishad, to police custody for two days again. According to police sources, a resident of Purulia town filed a complaint against Sujoy at the Purulia Sadar Police Station, alleging that he was harassed with 'casteist slurs'. It was in connection with this case that the court ordered two days of police custody for Sujoy today." "Notably, Sujoy was arrested around midnight on July 11 from his residence in Lakhra village under Pancha police station area on charges of attempting to tamper with government documents. On the same charges, Sujoy's nephew Kripasindhu Bandyopadhyay, the Vice President of Pancha Panchayat Samiti, and Charanpahari Das, a local Youth Trinamool leader and Public Works Karmadhakshya of the same Panchayat Samiti, were also arrested. When the three arrested persons were produced in court the next day, July 12, the judge ordered two days of police custody for all of them. Following the expiry of their custody, when the ac-



cused were produced in court again on July 14, the judge sent them to police custody for another four days. After the end of those four days, when the three were brought before the court on Saturday (July 18), the judge ordered judicial custody for Kripasindhu and Charanpahari, but sent Sujoy to police custody for two days in connection with the 'casteist harassment' complaint." "Meanwhile, last Friday evening, the police arrested Chandan Singh Malla, a Trinamool labor

leader in Barabazar. A resident of local Rajapara filed a police complaint against him, alleging forced land encroachment, death threats when demanding the due money for the land, as well as assault and extortion. Based on that complaint, the police arrested Chandan. When he was produced before the Purulia District Court on Saturday, the judge ordered two days of police custody for the accused. Saddam Hossain Ansari, the district president of the Trinamool's Minority

Cell, is also in police custody under court orders." "Two days ago, a resident of Lipaniya Jamtara village within the Purulia Mofussil Police Station area lodged a complaint against Saddam at the same police station. The complainant claimed that since 2020, Saddam had taken over eight lakh rupees from him in several installments, promising him a job. When he went to demand his money back a few days ago, Saddam threatened to kill him.

He even went to his house and threatened his mother as well." A Purulia court remanded Sujoy Bandyopadhyay, Vice President of Purulia Zilla Parishad, to two days of police custody in a fresh case alleging casteist harassment. A resident of Purulia town lodged a complaint at Purulia Sadar Police Station accusing Bandyopadhyay of subjecting him to caste-based slurs. Bandyopadhyay was originally arrested around midnight on July 11 alongside his nephew Kripasindhu Bandyopadhyay and local Trinamool leader Charanpahari Das for allegedly attempting to tamper with government documents.

Nationwide Student Protests and Hunger Strikes Follow Delhi Police Crackdown

Kolkata: Police action against protesters in New Delhi sparked outrage on campuses across Calcutta on Monday. Hundreds of students of Jadavpur University marched in protest, condemning what they described as "police brutality on a peaceful protest". Students, teachers and research scholars walked from the 8B bus terminus to Golpark, around 2.6km away. It was the first major rally by JU students and teachers since the BJP came to power in Bengal in early May. Many protesters raised slogans demanding the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, alleging that the Centre was "crushing the future of India's youth".

At Presidency University, students stood on waterlogged College Street to register their protest. Students of Medical College Kolkata observed a 12-hour hunger strike on



the campus in solidarity with the movement at Jantar Mantar. At the JU rally, many carried posters of Sonam Wangchuk, who had been on a 21-day hunger strike demanding, among other things, Pradhan's resignation before being forcibly removed by police and admitted to a government hospital. The protests in Delhi have drawn support from campuses across the country. The JU students carried posters that read: "Rest or Protest?" and "You lock our saints, you leak our tests. The youth will rise and never rest." Anushna

Das, a postgraduate student, said: "Several students have died by suicide because of the incompetence of the NTA. They have been killed by the system. By forcibly removing Sonam Wangchuk from the protest site and cracking down on demonstrators at Jantar Mantar, the Centre may think it can silence students. But the movement is now spreading across campuses nationwide." As the march moved towards Gol Park, slogans demanding the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan grew louder.

Attendance at school was impacted by flu and final night

Kolkata, July 21: On Monday, many schools saw poor student attendance, particularly in senior classes. Calcutta was awake until 3.30 am due to Spain's triumph over Argentina. Attendance in Classes VI through XII at South Point High School and The Heritage School was as low as thirty percent. At its sites in Calcutta, Kalyani, Howrah, and Ganganagar, the Julien Day schools had somewhat higher attendance rates, with 35 to 40% of kids showing up. Attendance at some schools, such as Delhi Public School New Town and The Newtown School, was over 70%, which is still significantly lower than what would be expected on a Monday. Students were also encouraged to stay away by institutions' liberal policies, many of which postponed exams on Monday. "Most of the absentees were in the morning session, which starts at 6.40am. In the second session at 11.30am, attendance was not so poor. Children got time to sleep in the morning, and they came to school also because they wanted to discuss the match," said Jaidev Ghosh, the South Point High School principal. Morning assemblies, classrooms, and lunch breaks across schools were abuzz with discussions about Spain's triumph, the return of the Red Army, the red cards, and Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez's gritty performance. Many youngsters rooted for Spain and celebrated Ferran Torres's match-winning goal. Even supporters of Spain acknowledged that Lionel Messi's emotional departure pained them. Ismael Hyiat Khan, a Class X student at La Martiniere for Boys who missed school on Monday, said, "It was heartbreaking to see the greatest of all time so emotional at the end of the game, but Spain dominated the game from the start." However, there were other factors contributing to the low turnout besides football. Many kids have viral fever, and some of them had to miss their tests. "Every class has had some absentees over the past two weeks or so because they are unwell," stated Father Roshan Turkey, principal of St. Xavier's Collegiate School. The Heritage School's principal, Seema Sapru, reported an increase in fever. According to Sapru, "they sit in air-conditioned classrooms or buses, get soaked in the rain, and they report sick." Children have skipped exams at a number of schools due to health issues.

Abhishek Banerjee is granted respite by the High Court till October 6

Kolkata, July 21: In a case involving Trinamool MP Abhishek Banerjee's comment about loud DJ music, the high court on Monday prolonged until October 6 its previous decision prohibiting police from using coercive tactics against Banerjee. However, the court rejected his request to go overseas for eye care. Abhishek's request for permission to travel was denied by Justice Saugata Bhattacharyya, who noted that a board of top physicians at SSKM Hospital could be established for his care. Appearing for Abhishek, his lawyer said the MP had cooperated with the investigation, pointing to his appearance before a Bidhannagar court last week to provide a voice sample. The lawyer argued that Abhishek had been travelling abroad for treatment for several years and sought permission for him to continue doing so. He also requested an extension of protection from coercive action, citing his client's cooperation with investigators. While extending the protection, the judge said that previous treatment abroad did not mean similar treatment was unavailable in Bengal. "You may have been travelling abroad for treatment for 20 years, but that does not mean the treatment is not available here. The situation is different now. All treatments are being done in Bengal. Get the treatment at SSKM Hospital. See what they have to say. If needed, I can instruct the formation of a medical board for this," Justice Bhattacharyya said. Sources said the plea seeking permission to travel abroad for treatment is likely to be heard separately on Tuesday.

KMC works nonstop to redesign wards, and borough teams must turn in reports by July 23

Kolkata, July 21: In order to finish the city's ward delimitation by the deadline, the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, which is frequently accused for its tardiness in responding to citizen complaints, is operating on a war footing, with officials skipping weekly vacations.

Teams at the borough level have till Thursday to turn in their reports to a central committee, which will then create a report for the entire city and present it to KMC administrator Smita Pandey by Sunday. Pandey will evaluate the findings and send it to the state government, which is anticipated to release a draft of the updated ward borders by July 31. After the process, there would be about 200 wards in the 144-ward civic region.

According to officials, the teams have been told to follow the timelines and are turning in daily progress reports. "The borough teams have just three days to submit their reports. A KMC official stated on Monday that a central committee made up of senior engineers and bureaucrats will create a report for the entire city of Calcutta and deliver it to the administrator by July 26. On July 10, the delimitation process got underway. An official stated, "We have very little time, and it is a mammoth exercise." The KMC and state government representatives determined that each ward should have roughly the same number of voters—between 14,000 and 18,000. Voter strength currently differs by ward. Some wards in Shyampukur and Burrabazar have only



12,000 to 15,000 voters, while Ward 66 in Topsia has more than 80,000 and Ward 109 in Mukundapur about 45,000, sources said. The KMC covers 206sqkm and has around 32 lakh voters. "There need to be about 200 wards if each has between 14,000 and 18,000 voters.

The boundaries are being redrawn based on this," an official said. Borough teams have been tasked with verifying on the ground whether the proposed boundaries comply with the guidelines. Roads should serve as ward boundaries, all voters of a polling booth should be from one ward, and newly created wards should stay within the same Assembly constituency.

"The borough teams are examining whether the maps drawn on the table strictly follow these guidelines. Field visits may reveal discrepancies, requiring

the boundaries to be redrawn," an official said. The central delimitation committee will examine issues flagged by the borough teams before preparing the final map for around 200 wards. Sources said a ward such as Topsia's Ward 66 could be split into five. Officials said ward sizes will vary because areas such as Dalhousie and Dhapa have relatively few voters despite covering large geographical stretches. When portions of Joka—now wards 142, 143, and 144—were added to the KMC in 2012, it was the final significant extension of the civic body's borders. Previous expansions occurred around Independence, when Cossipore and Tollygunge were combined with the then-Corporation of Calcutta, and in the early 1980s, when Behala, Jadavpur, and Garden Reach were added and some ward boundaries were modified.

After a 17-year-old child dies at a rehabilitation facility in Haridevpur, four people are detained

Kolkata, July 21: On Sunday, a 17-year-old boy's family filed a murder complaint after he passed away at a rehabilitation facility just hours after being transported there from his home. Four people have been taken into custody. According to police, on Sunday night, representatives from a rehabilitation facility in Haridevpur visited the boy's Bansdroni residence and allegedly coerced him into a car before removing him. His parents were called later that night to report that he



had passed out. He was dead when they arrived at MR Bangur Hospital. "The police were informed through Dial 100 at 8.35pm that a teenager had been taken to a rehabilitation centre and was later declared dead at the hospital. The youth was brought to the rehab cen-

tre that evening. As he was unwilling to go, he was allegedly forced into a car," a police officer said. The boy's parents said that while he was being transported to the center, he was beaten and died. A murder case has been filed by the police against the officials of the center. The FIR names five people, including the driver of the vehicle and a woman. Four of them have been taken into custody: driver Ritesh Mondal, Sourav Das, Monojit Adhikary, and Swapan Pramanick.

Students resist the crackdown in Delhi by holding hunger strikes and protest marches on campuses

Kolkata, July 21: On Monday, protests on campuses in Calcutta were outraged by police actions against demonstrators in New Delhi. In protest of what they called "police brutality on a peaceful protest," hundreds of Jadavpur University students marched. Golpark is about 2.6 km distant from the 8B bus terminal, and students, instructors, and research scholars strolled there. It was the first significant demonstration by JU instructors and students since the BJP took control of Bengal in early May. Many protesters raised slogans demanding the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, alleging that the Centre was "crushing the future of India's youth". At Presidency University, students stood on waterlogged College Street to register their protest. Students of Medical College Kolkata observed a 12-hour hunger strike on the campus in solidarity with the movement at Jantar Mantar. At the JU rally, many carried posters of Sonam Wangchuk, who had been on a 21-day hunger strike demanding, among other things, Pradhan's resignation before being forc-

ibly removed by police and admitted to a government hospital. Campuses all throughout the nation have expressed solidarity for the protesters in Delhi. "Rest or Protest?" and "You lock our saints, you leak our tests" were among the posters carried by the JU students. Young people will never stop rising. Postgraduate student Anushna Das stated: "The NTA's inefficiency has caused several students to commit suicide. The system has killed them. The Center may believe it can silence students by forcibly removing Sonam Wangchuk from the protest site and suppressing protesters at Jantar Mantar. However, the movement is currently gaining traction on campuses all around the country. Slogans calling for the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan became more audible as the march approached Gol Park. A few parents participated in the demonstration as well. One parent, who wished to remain anonymous, claimed that the recurrent leaks of exam papers amounted to institutional corruption and that the minister in charge of these failures need to

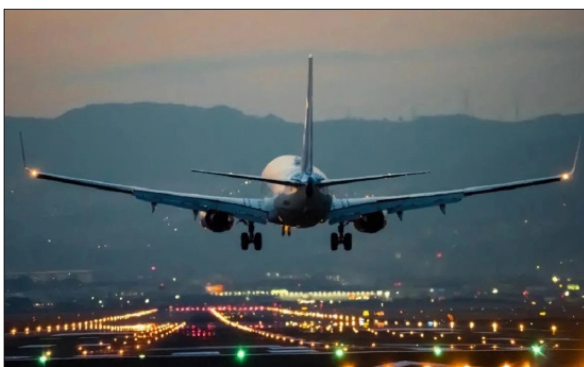
accept responsibility and step down." Everyone is concerned about our children's futures. My sympathies are with the parents whose sons and daughters committed suicide as a result of the paper leak. During the Trinamool government, the BJP in Bengal had been outspoken about irregularities in the school recruitment scandal. The parent stated, "It must now explain why it keeps supporting a minister who has consistently failed to stop paper leaks. "The worst kind of corruption is this." Partha Pratim Roy, a physics professor at Jadavpur University, said that a crooked and organised gang was responsible for the paper leaks. "To stop people from speaking out against this organised corruption, the Union government is using force." However, Roy stated that students cannot be intimidated. Students at Presidency University hoisted placards calling for the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan. A 12-hour hunger strike by about fifty Medical College Kolkata students called for the resignation of the minister and the elimination of the National Testing Agency.

Traffic is severely hampered, airport access is choked, and aircraft operations are disrupted by heavy rain

Kolkata, July 21: Flight operations and airport-bound traffic were severely hampered by Monday afternoon's heavy rain, which continued to cause congestion long after the storms had stopped. Passengers had to wade through water to get to cars and app cabs because the area outside the terminal's arrival level remained waterlogged for several hours.

According to airport sources, a number of travellers missed their flights due to traffic bottlenecks on VIP Road, especially near Haldiram's, Kaikhali, and Chinar Park. Due to traffic, Major General (Retd) V.N. Chaturvedi, secretary-general of the Vidya Mandir Society, which operates Birla High School for Boys, Sushila Birla Girls' School, and Birla High School Mukundapur, was unable to board his Air India flight to Delhi at 7:15 p.m. "I left my home on Loudon Street at 4pm and took the Bypass via Parama. From there, I took VIP Road and reached the airport only at 7.25pm," he said. Air India later accommodated him on another flight.

The Met office recorded 163mm of rain in Dum Dum between 1pm and 5.30pm. The rain was heaviest between 1.30pm and 3.30pm. In Met parlance, 60mm of rain in 24 hours qualifies as heavy rain. "The visibility started dipping from 1.30pm. At least five Calcutta-bound flights were



diverted because of the blinding rain and strong winds between 1.30pm and 3pm," said a senior airport official. The weather caused five arriving planes to be rerouted. According to airport officials, aircraft from Guwahati and Agartala were diverted to Varanasi, one from Chennai to Bhubaneswar, one from Hyderabad to Ranchi, and one from Patna to Ranchi. There were about 14 departures that were almost an hour late.

Parts of the tarmac, the first-floor departure area, the parking lot, and the area outside the arrival level were all flooded. The water had to be drained out using pumps, according to an airport official. According to sources, the parking lot and arrival area were still under water until about 6 p.m. The parking lot was submerged as well. A frequent traveller said, "I haven't seen this in many years." Traffic continued to crawl on VIP Road, particularly around Haldiram's and Chinar Park, long after the rain had subsided. Sev-

eral passengers got stuck in the congestion, causing delays and missed flights.

"Passengers who missed their flights are being accommodated on later services," an airport source said. At 3.52pm, the airport posted on X: "Heavy traffic reported towards NSCB Airport from Chingrihata."

A Ballygunge resident who left home around 4pm to receive a relative at the airport was still stuck near Kaikhali at 7pm as vehicles barely moved on VIP Road. Near a traffic outpost in Kaikhali, a Salt Lake resident on her way to the airport stepped out of her car and swam through waist-deep water to ask for help from the police. According to the cops, she was eventually placed on an auto. The Bidhannagar Municipal Corporation's ongoing Metro construction and drainage upgrade projects in Kaikhali were blamed by airport officials for the waterlogging. "The water isn't pouring out properly. We are working with the civic body and Metro officials," an official stated.

Heavy rain floods the north, drizzles the south, and causes airline delays and traffic jams

Kolkata, July 21: On Monday afternoon, the city's north and northern outskirts were battered by intense rain, which caused aircraft delays and severe traffic jams. According to airport officials, over a dozen departures were delayed by up to an hour, and at least four flights headed for Calcutta were rerouted. Long after the showers had subsided, traffic on VIP Road continued to crawl late into the night. A number of travellers were unable to board their flights. For hours, the parking lot and the arrival area outside the terminal building were submerged in water. There were light showers in south Calcutta and severe rain in north Calcutta. A Met official attributed the uneven distribution of rain to differences in moisture convergence. "The moisture convergence was heavier over North 24-Parganas and north Calcutta. Some pockets of South 24-Parganas, neighbouring Bangladesh, also saw heavy moisture convergence. The rain was heavy in these areas. South Calcutta had relatively less moisture convergence," said H.R. Biswas, head of the Regional Meteorological Centre in Alipore. Calcutta often sees uneven rain distribution during the pre-monsoon squall season, with some areas remaining dry while others are drenched. "That is unlikely in monsoon. It rained across the city, but the south got light rain. The sky was consistently cloudy," Biswas said. Civic pumping station readings showed Maniktala received 70mm of rain, Ultadanga 71mm, College Square 74mm and Tangra 99mm. At the same time, Alipore recorded around 25mm. In Met parlance, 60mm of rain in 24 hours qualifies as heavy rain. VIP Road,

College Street, several stretches of Central Avenue near Yogayog Bhavan and Bowbazar, as well as parts of Salt Lake and New Town, were inundated. A Behala resident took more than three hours to drive home from her office in New Town on Monday evening. A resident of a gated community on VIP Road was about to leave for her office in central Calcutta when it started raining. "Soon, the stretch till the main entrance was under ankle-deep water. VIP Road was also submerged. I could not step out," she said. The Met office has forecast more rain across the state in the coming days. The city is likely to receive light to moderate rain. "There is still an upper air cyclonic circulation up to 1.5 km above mean sea level over north Jharkhand and neighbouring Bihar.

A trough that extends up to 1.5 km above mean sea level crosses north Gangetic West Bengal and Bangladesh on its way to Tripura from the above upper-air cyclonic circulation. According to the Met report, the monsoon trough at mean sea level currently passes through Sri Ganganagar, Rohtak, Hardoi, Varanasi, Daltonganj, Purnia, and Digha before heading southeast towards the northeast Bay of Bengal. The monsoon trough was the primary cause of rain in south Bengal, according to Met authorities, while the first two systems caused significant rain in north Bengal. According to the advisory, there will probably be a lot of rain on Wednesday and Thursday in North and South 24-Parganas, East Midnapore, West Burdwan, and Bankura. Light to moderate rain is predicted for Calcutta.

Rival TMC factions organise concurrent gatherings in Kolkata while Mamata Banerjee maintains a nocturnal surveillance

Kolkata, July 21: With the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC) faction, a rival group led by Ritabrata Banerjee, and the Congress holding separate programs within a 2.5-kilometer radius in central Kolkata amid unprecedented security arrangements, Bengal's politically significant July 21 Martyrs' Day entered uncharted territory on Tuesday. The former chief minister and senior leaders, including Abhishek Banerjee, Derek O'Brien, Kalyan Banerjee, and Dola Sen, spent the night at the location close to Birla Planetarium hours before the programs started. Her faction claimed that the stage, banners, and sound system had been vandalised in an effort to disrupt the event. Throughout the night, party workers kept watch over the location. Addressing supporters around midnight, Mamata alleged that party workers and families of those killed in the 1993 police firing were being prevented from attending the programme. "Our workers are being stopped from coming to the

meeting. Families of the martyrs are being intimidated by the police. Our stage has been vandalised, banners torn, and power and microphone lines cut. Around 60-65 BJP-backed goons, led by a criminal who is out on court orders, carried out the attack," she alleged. Without naming chief minister Suwendu Adhikari, she accused the BJP government of attempting to disrupt the programme through "police action and intimidation". The BJP dismissed the allegations. State minister Dilip Ghosh questioned why leaders of the Mamata-led faction had remained at the venue since Monday night. "This is supposed to be a programme to honour martyrs, not a protest stage. They can sit there all night, but nobody is with them anymore. They betrayed the martyrs, their families and ultimately the people," Ghosh said. For the first time since the BJP ended the Trinamool Congress' 15-year rule in Bengal earlier this year, the annual July 21 observance is taking place amid a split in the party and a changed political landscape.

After receiving approval from the Calcutta High Court, the Mamata Banerjee faction is hosting their event on Cathedral Road next to Birla Planetarium. While the Congress is hosting a different gathering at Shahid Minar, the opposing group led by Leader of the Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee is planning a parallel protest close to the Mahatma Gandhi statue on Mayo Road, claiming to be the "real Trinamool Congress". On July 21, 1993, 13 Youth Congress employees were killed by police gunfire during a march to Writers' Buildings. Since 1994, Mamata Banerjee has commemorated the day every year, and it has historically been the TMC's largest political rally. This year's commemoration has acquired added political significance after the BJP government tabled in the Assembly on Monday the long-withheld judicial commission report on the 1993 firing. Adhikari accused the previous TMC government of suppressing its findings for political gain despite repeatedly invoking the incident as a symbol of sacrifice. With

three political camps commemorating the anniversary at nearby venues, Kolkata Police have mounted extensive security arrangements across the central business district.

Around 1,000 personnel, including the Rapid Action Force (RAF), High Radio Flying Squad (HRFS) and central forces, have been deployed, while drone surveillance is being conducted over all three venues under the supervision of at least five deputy commissioners. Although commuters have been warned to anticipate severe traffic around Shahid Minar, Mayo Road, Red Road, Dufferin Road, and the Cathedral Road-Victoria Memorial area, police stated no routes would be entirely stopped. One-way arrangements are used to control traffic on Cathedral Road. Vehicles are permitted to travel along Harish Mukherjee Road towards Park Street until 1 pm. After that, the direction will be changed to make it easier to move from the Park Street side towards Harish Mukherjee Road.



Why Communities Need Public Conversations

Communities grow stronger when people have opportunities to discuss local issues openly and respectfully. Town hall meetings, public consultations, citizen forums and neighbourhood gatherings allow residents to share concerns before they become conflicts. Unfortunately, such conversations often happen only after a crisis has already emerged.Regular dialogue builds trust, improves decision-making and encourages shared responsibility.Healthy communities are not those without disagreements, but those that know how to discuss them constructively.

Remember the gap

The worldwide fertility narrative has changed quicker than anyone expected. The world’s total fertility rate, which was nearly five children per woman in 1950, is currently at 2.2. Approximately 7 out of 10 people in the globe presently live in nations with a replacement rate of less than 2.1, and UN forecasts indicate that three out of four will pass that line by 2050. India is already among them. Its TFR remained at 2.0 during two rounds of the National Family Health Survey. That in itself is not exceptional. Japan passed that level in 1957, with a per capita income of around \$330 in current terms, and China in 1991, with a per capita income of about \$350 – both were significantly poorer than India today. What helped Japan, South Korea and China overcome these early fertility declines is the following decades of rapid growth that made them rich, or nearly so, before the deeper fertility crisis they now face. The question is whether India follows the same path or grows old without ever converting its dividend into growth.The stakes are not merely demographic. Fertility decline is the proximate cause of rising old-age dependencies the world over. Within a few decades, for example, advanced economies are expected to have about 2 working-age adults per pensioner, down from 4 or 5 today. Fewer workers mean fewer taxpayers, less national saving, and more public expenditure on retirement, pensions and healthcare. The newer finding is that this decline may not be temporary. The recent research of the Harvard economist, Claudia Goldin, traces the initial drops in the United States of America and in Europe to newly-autonomous women and a mismatch between their expectations of family life and what men were willing to give up — existing domestic arrangements benefit men more than women and where the odds are poor men will abandon them, leading to some career-oriented women to forego children altogether while others delay indefinitely. This builds on earlier research that won her the 2023 Nobel Prize: reliable, legally-accessible contraception in the early 1970s let women plan long careers with the same certainty men always had, and it was then that US fertility first fell below replacement.Goldin’s recent conclusion that the fall in fertility could be permanent because it narrows only as fast as men’s behaviour changes is unsentimental. This pattern repeats at scale across countries. Women got unprecedented access to education and paid work in Japan, South Korea and southern Europe but continue bearing the domestic burden almost entirely themselves. And it is these countries that saw the sharpest declines in fertility rates. For India, this mismatch is twined with its jobs problem, and the two require solving together. Transforming a still-large, working-age population into growth needs employment creation at a scale the country has not yet managed. And a large share of that must come from women whose labour force participation trails men’s by a wide margin. Raising female employment without any change in who does the unpaid domestic work is exactly what is causing fertility rates to fall across West and East Asia. Reaping the demographic dividend and avoiding that trade-off are, in practice, the same task. On the scale of the challenge alone, nearly 7 to 8 million people enter the workforce each year. But India has missed the labour-intensive industrial stage that drove decades of high growth in Japan, Korea and China. Just one-fifth of India’s workforce is skilled, roughly 2 in 5 young graduates are unemployed, and fewer than 1 in 14 young male graduates registering unemployed manage a permanent salaried job within the year. A demographic dividend not absorbed into productive work is not just wasted; the unemployed and underemployed become social and fiscal liabilities instead of the growth drivers that lifted India’s peers past the same low-fertility starting point.

The Refugee Without a Passport and the Illegal Immigrant With Indian Papers

The case of Maung Henry Htoo Aung Linn before the Delhi High Court is about more than just admission to Delhi University; it also highlights a conflict in India’s approach to refugees, citizenship, and identity in north-eastern border states.A teenage Myanmar refugee who escaped his own country and studied in India is now legally pursuing university admission. He does not claim to be an Indian citizen, does not seek Scheduled Tribes benefits, and does not attempt to join the electoral rolls. He appears in court as a refugee, arguing that Delhi University should not require a passport that his refugee status makes difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Then, there have long been reports in Manipur that certain Myanmar nationals have crossed the border, gained Aadhaar cards, joined electoral registers, obtained local identity documents, and enjoyed benefits granted to Scheduled Tribes under broad categories such as Any Kuki Tribes.The issue that India must address is that the honest refugee is conspicuous and vulnerable, whereas the illegal immigrant with Indian documents may become administratively invisible. Maung Henry’s case shows the burden carried by those who follow the transparent route. According to available details, he fled Myanmar in 2022, completed Class 10 in Mizoram and Class 12 in the Science stream in Meghalaya, and later sought admission to Delhi University. His difficulty

began because Delhi University requires foreign applicants to submit a passport. His lawyers argued that treating a refugee in the same manner as an ordinary foreign applicant violates the logic of equality and dignity under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.“How can you expect a passport from a refugee?” the court said during the hearing.A passport is issued by a State and a refugee is often a person who has lost the protection of that very State. To demand a passport as the only acceptable identity document from such a person is to misunderstand the nature of displacement.This does not mean universities should abandon verification and Delhi University has every right to protect its admission process. Public institutions cannot function on sympathy alone. They need documents, records, scrutiny and accountability. Admission to Delhi University is highly competitive even for Indian citizens and a refugee cannot be admitted merely because the person is a refugee. But the person should not be rejected merely because of not having a passport.The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) registration, Indian school records, residence verification, police verification and clearances from the ministry concerned can together provide an alternative documentation system. Such a system would not weaken the law but make it more realistic. India is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention

or the 1967 Protocol. It also does not have a dedicated national refugee law due to which refugees are often handled through executive discretion, local practice, court intervention and UNHCR documentation. The absence of a clear legal framework has led to confusion, especially in relation to people fleeing Myanmar.The problem becomes acute in Manipur. The India-Myanmar border is porous and ethnic ties run across the boundary with some communities on both sides sharing kinship, language, culture and clan connections. In normal times, this social closeness may serve as a bridge but in times of conflict, it becomes a source of suspicion. Manipur has already suffered from ethnic violence and competing claims over land and indigenous identity. Documentation is no longer a technical matter but it touches political and social dimensions. An Aadhaar card, a voter identity card, a Scheduled Tribes certificate or a land-related document can alter access to rights and political representation.This is why the allegations of illegal Myanmar nationals obtaining Indian documents in Manipur need an investigation. It would be fraud against the State and injustice to genuine citizens if a foreign national enters India and obtains critical documents illegally.The Scheduled Tribes framework is meant to protect recognised indigenous communities and it cannot become a route through which doubtful citizenship is

normalised. The category ‘Any Kuki Tribes’ has long been politically sensitive in Manipur because of questions over identity, classification and cross-border ethnic overlap. Any misuse of this category by non-citizens would deepen public resentment and weaken trust in constitutional safeguards.In the case of Maung Henry, he did not hide behind forged citizenship. He only asked to be treated as what he is - a refugee seeking education. Many in Manipur believe that doubtful citizens have managed to secure documents and benefits while genuine refugees who remain transparent face restrictions. The State cannot allow such questions to remain unresolved. Refugees must be protected as refugees and citizens must be verified as citizens but illegal immigrants must not be allowed to become citizens through paperwork acquired by fraud or negligence. There must be a clear distinction between the three categories. First, there are Indian citizens belonging to recognised Scheduled Tribes communities and their constitutional rights must be protected. Second, there are genuine Myanmar refugees who have fled conflict or persecution and are willing to register, submit to verification and live under lawful restrictions. They deserve humanitarian protection, education and dignity without being granted citizenship benefits by default.And third, there are illegal immigrants who may have obtained Indian documents through false claims, weak

verification or local networks. They must be identified through due process and fraudulent documents must be cancelled. Confusing these categories is dangerous as it harms genuine citizens and genuine refugees while fuelling ethnic mistrust.The Delhi High Court case should not be seen only as a matter of Delhi University admission rules, but should become a national moment for policy clarity. India needs a refugee documentation framework that allows verified refugees to study, work within permitted limits and live with dignity. It also needs a strict citizenship verification mechanism in sensitive border states to prevent illegal entrants from acquiring citizen-only benefits.A refugee card must not become citizenship, Aadhaar must not become proof of nationality by default, electoral rolls must be protected from doubtful entries and Scheduled Tribes benefits must go only to legally entitled Indian citizens. But universities must be given a lawful methods to consider genuine refugees who cannot produce passports. A humane refugee policy and a strict citizenship policy can go together. The state must not punish the refugee who is honest enough to identify himself or herself as a refugee, and not reward those who bypass the refugee process and enter the citizenship system through questionable means.That would send the worst possible message that transparency brings hurdles while concealment brings benefits.

Not just jets, China is developing a ‘5-piece’ carrier set, and India should be worried

In June 2026, images from China revealed a carrier-configured J-35 fighter with the serial number 350030. It reveals that at least 30 airframes of the new navy stealth fighter have departed Shenyang Aircraft Corporation (SAC)’s production lines. The industrial architecture underpinning this capacity was revealed in August 2023, when SAC announced plans to invest USD 1.2 billion in a new aeronautical complex the size of six football fields (approximately 370,000 square metres) with its own flight-test runway. With such a complicated and vast new warplane production capability in place, Beijing can now experiment with what Chinese officials refer to as the “new frontier of sea-based naval power.” a ‘carrier five-piece set’ involving a stealth carrier fighter jet, a carrier-based fixed wing early warning aircraft, a carrier-based fixed wing electronic warfare aircraft, a multirole catapult-launched carrier-based fighter jet, and a carrier-based anti-submarine warfare helicopter. As China’s Defence Ministry spokesperson Jiang Bin framed it, the induction of this five-part combination completes a Chinese carrier strike group’s system-of-systems combat capability. Of the PLA Navy’s three carriers - Liaoning, Shandong and Fujian - only the Fujian, commissioned in late 2025 with three electromagnetic catapults (CATOBAR) proven at sea, can operate the full set as designed. CATOBAR enables the carrier to have more airpower by allowing electromagnetically powered, catapult-assisted take-off for heavyweight aircraft on a short deck - a much better alternative than

both steam-powered catapults and ski-jump ramp-based take-off (STOBAR) that relies on the aircraft’s own engine. Till such a time, the matter of concern is not so much the J-35’s active deployment, but the exports of its widely-produced variants, especially to Pakistan. Understood piece by piece, the set is hugely inspired by a US carrier’s air power wing. The J-35 is pitched as the competitor to the F-35C in terms of roles and capabilities, though the merits remain debatable. The J-15T heavy fighter, with its payload and combat radius built for a saturation attack, is the answer to the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet. The KJ-600 - China’s first fixed-wing carrier AEW aircraft, nicknamed the “air-sea command centre” in state media for its added warning time and interception efficiency - is framed as a counterpart to the E-2D Hawkeye. The J-15DT/DH electronic attack variants track the EA-18G Growler. The Z-20F, replacing the Z-18F for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations, has been acknowledged by the Pentagon itself in its 2024 ‘China Military Power Report’ to be similar to the US Navy’s SH-60 family, and a “significant ASW improvement”. These aircraft have become popular since they flew in formation at the September 3 military parade last year, even as new naval power elements such as the GJ-21 “Sharp Sword” Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle (UCAV) have subsequently joined the team. All of these elements of sea-based aerial power are manufactured by industry groups and complexes, which are all subsidies of one massive defence State-Owned Enter-

prise (SOE) - the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC). It is the entity Beijing relies on to build modernised carrier combat power, even as various other AVIC-affiliated manufacturers help integrate capabilities such as sensing, jamming, striking and screening into a single system operating from a deck. Completing the set is thus a statement about what kind of navy China intends to field - one built to fight the way American carrier aviation fights, from catapults, with stealth, and at range. Not surprisingly, many of AVIC’s subsidies are featured on the US’s 1260H List, which restricts operations of “Chinese Military Companies,” impacting AVIC’s international standing across markets. But, not with Pakistan. China is now the only state serially producing two distinct stealth fighter families simultaneously, with some estimates projecting that advanced-fighter output across all jet programmes could reach 300-400 aircraft annually by 2027. At the same time, the market is refining itself for China to leverage. Pakistan, reportedly seeking the J-35AE and a package including KJ-500 AEW&C aircraft and HQ-19 air defences, is potentially the first foreign operator of a Chinese fifth-generation fighter. The five-piece set is thus a defence-industrial story as much as an indigenous military-power story.The proficiency of China’s air wing is yet to be tested. Not to mention, the US Navy’s advantage was never just the CATOBAR capability but over 70 years of continuous catapult operations. Parades are not nearly enough to replace or compress the results of actual operationalisation, which are

derived from deck-based operations by aircraft at sea, as well as their sorties, and the creation of a pool of both first-tour and experienced naval aviators. Hence, the actual capabilities of the J-35 must be analysed based on how they fare in training drills to begin with, but also, in large-scale military exercises, or, at the extreme, high-stakes maritime conflicts, in the near future. For India, there are three takeaways. The first is that SAC’s production lines may potentially soon be feeding even further into Pakistan’s air force, making any skirmishes with Rawalpindi a proxy contest with many more Chinese aircraft. The second is that, given the kind of edge quantitative output grants China, we may soon see the PLA Navy operate for prolonged periods in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) - to the extent that quantity supplements blue water capabilities. India’s own twin-engine deck-based fighter and, in the near future, a naval-variant trajectory for the AMCA, may need genuine fast-tracking, especially if predominance in the IOR is to be preserved. Third, the five-piece framework exposes the need for India to roll out STOBAR decks and replace capacities with the contemporary north star in Carrier Battle Group (CBG) operations. It could likely mean looking at a third aircraft carrier with a clear-eyed assessment of the cost and timeline of CATOBAR. Because China has so far only highlighted the set and tested it in trials, integrated and far-distance air wing capability remains undemonstrated. If the powers that be take the cue, now is the time for India’s carrier-and-catapult debate to evolve.

Is Sharad Pawar Planning To Merge NCP And NDA Behind The Ongoing Calculations

The current flurry of activity surrounding Sharad Pawar and his group of the NCP has fuelled conjecture about his next move. His move might upend the political chessboard in Maharashtra, where equations remain unstable amid ongoing instability and uncertainty, despite the apparent stability of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA administration. Sharad Pawar’s conversations with his party officials over the last few weeks appear to indicate that he is seriously considering joining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Certainly, this is what the BJP wants, since Pawar’s eight Lok Sabha MPs will provide much-needed numbers if the Modi government makes a second attempt to pass the contentious delimitation law during the monsoon session of Parliament, which begins on July 21. However, Sharad

Pawar is known to keep his cards close to his chest. Consequently, it would be unwise to second-guess a leader who has built himself a formidable reputation as one of the canniest politicians in the country.A String Of VisitsDespite this caveat, it is obvious that Sharad Pawar is weighing the benefits of leading his party into the NDA. Over the past couple of weeks, he has met Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis as well as Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.Following these interactions, a close aide of Sharad Pawar, Maharashtra MLA Jayant Patil, held late-night talks with Fadnavis. Two prominent MPs from the rival NCP faction headed by late Ajit Pawar’s widow Sunetra Pawar, Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare, were also present.Two days later, Patil met Shinde along with another Sharad Pawar loy-

alist, Jitendra Awhad. The three of them were closeted in a room for more than an hour, and Shinde had to delay his trip to Delhi for an important NDA meeting ahead of the Parliament session. If no decision has been announced so far despite all these hectic moves, it’s because a second and far more tempting option is unfolding behind the scenes: the possibility of reviving his dream of reuniting his splintered party and preserving the Sharad Pawar legacy in western Maharashtra.Ajit Pawar’s DeathA reunification would have happened by now but for nephew Ajit Pawar’s unexpected death in a plane crash in January this year. Although the younger Pawar had dealt his uncle a personal blow by splitting the NCP, joining the NDA, bringing down the MVA government Sharad Pawar had crafted with Uddhav Thackeray as

chief minister, and then going on to thrash the NCP(SP) in the assembly elections in 2024, he had a change of heart in late 2025 and had started talks for a merger of the two factions. The timeline was set for early 2026, after the local polls. But then came the tragic passing of Ajit Pawar. It was a bolt out of the blue. Apart from the personal loss, Sharad Pawar found his reunification plan unravelling as the BJP persuaded Ajit Pawar’s widow, Sunetra Pawar, to take on her husband’s mantle, lead his party, and fill his position as deputy chief minister in the Fadnavis-led NDA government. Why Party Leaders Are Miffed With Sunetra PawarAccording to those who are familiar with the politics of the Pawar clan, she took these steps without consulting Sharad Pawar, who has always ruled the family like a benev-

olent patriarch.Not surprisingly, she is now rapidly losing authority and control. Being a complete greenhorn in politics, Sunetra Pawar has been increasingly relying on her sons, Parth and Jay, for decisions. This has angered senior members of her party who are chafing at the bit.Mounting resentment in the Ajit Pawar faction towards Sunetra Pawar and her sons has opened a door to renegotiate a merger with Sharad Pawar. There is no official confirmation of this, but there are several signals that all is not well in Ajit Pawar’s NCP.One is the recent late-night meeting Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare had with Sharad Pawar aide Jayant Patil and Devendra Fadnavis. Apparently, Sunetra Pawar was kept in the dark. This has driven another wedge between her and senior leaders of her party.

Turkish Airlines expands pilot training capacity with new CAE simulator deal

Kolkata: Turkish Airlines has signed a multi-year agreement with global aviation training technology provider CAE for the supply of five full-flight simulators (FFS) and two flight training devices (FTD), with an option to add two more full-flight simulators, reinforcing its long-term investment in pilot training as the airline accelerates fleet expansion.

The agreement, signed at the Farnborough Airshow, forms part of Turkish Airlines’ 10-year flight training investment plan and will support the carrier’s new state-of-the-art Flight Training Center. Construction of the facility began in January, with simulator hangars scheduled to become operational in 2027 and the full training centre expected to be fully operational in 2028.

Turkish Airlines Chairman of the Board and the Executive Committee Prof. Murat Şeker said strengthening pilot training infrastructure is critical to supporting the airline’s expanding fleet and global network while maintaining high standards



of safety, consistency and operational excellence. CAE President and Chief Executive Officer Matthew Bromberg said the agreement reflects the companies’ more than 20-year partnership and will provide advanced simulation technologies to help Turkish Airlines build pilot capacity and meet evolving operational requirements.

Under the contract, CAE will deliver two A321neo full-flight simulators, two B787 full-flight simulators, one A350 full-flight simulator and two A350 Level-1 flight training devices. The agreement also includes options for one additional A350 full-flight simulator

and one B787 full-flight simulator.

Although the investment is centred on Turkish Airlines’ global operations, the expansion of its pilot training ecosystem is expected to support future capacity growth on international routes, including South Asia. For Kolkata, where demand for overseas travel continues to rise, stronger operational capabilities at Turkish Airlines could enhance connectivity through Istanbul, benefiting business travellers, exporters, students and leisure passengers while strengthening the city’s access to European, Middle Eastern and transatlantic markets.

Unified bike taxi policy can unlock jobs and urban mobility, says CUTS report

Kolkata: India should adopt a harmonised, evidence-based regulatory framework for bike taxis to reduce policy uncertainty, protect gig workers, improve commuter safety and strengthen affordable urban mobility, according to a report released by CUTS International. The study, Harmonising Bike Taxi Regulations in India: An Evidence-Based Assessment and Suggested Pathways for Reform, was launched in New Delhi by Gopal Krishna Agarwal, National Spokesperson (Economic Affairs), Bharatiya Janata Party.

The report comes amid rapidly evolving state-level regulations, with governments adopting divergent approaches ranging from enabling frameworks and conditional approvals to restrictions, EV-only mandates and legal uncertainty. CUTS said the fragmented regulatory landscape has created challenges for commuters, gig workers, platform aggregators and



policymakers, making a strong case for a predictable and coherent policy framework.

The report recommends structured authorisation of non-transport motorcycles for bike taxi operations, platform-led accountability, harmonised safety standards and an incentive-based transition to electric vehicles. Speaking at the launch, Agarwal said

an integrated mobility ecosystem could emerge as a key driver of connectivity, employment, productivity and sustainable economic growth under India’s ease-of-living agenda.

A panel comprising representatives from CUTS International, Uber India and South Asia, Rapido, IIIT Delhi, Chiral Consulting and Chase Advisors highlighted the need to balance

commuter safety, worker welfare, innovation, consumer choice and regulatory certainty. CUTS reaffirmed its commitment to supporting evidence-based policymaking through continued engagement with governments, industry, academia and civil society, positioning bike taxis as an important component of India’s expanding urban mobility and gig economy.

Stock Indices Slip Marginally in Opening Session Amid Mixed Cues

Mumbai: Key equity benchmark indices recorded minor declines during early market trade as profit-taking in banking and financial equities offset gains across technology and consumer goods sectors.

The BSE Sensex shed 58 points to open at 77,649, while the NSE Nifty slipped 22 points to stand at 24,216 during early trading hours.

Financial analysts attributed the cautious market sentiment to mixed global signals, sustained foreign institutional capital outflows, and investor anticipation ahead of major corporate quarterly earnings disclosures.

Market movements remained bound within a narrow range as institutional investors adopted a watchful stance.

Trading volumes across derivative contracts reflected muted participation, with broader market indices showing mixed performance across mid-cap and small-cap segments.

Mobavenue AI bets on intelligent advertising with new brand identity and Neural Engine

Kolkata: Mobavenue AI Tech Limited has unveiled a new brand identity and launched the Mobavenue Neural Engine, an AI-powered intelligence layer designed to transform how brands plan, execute and measure advertising campaigns. The move marks the company’s evolution from a bootstrapped Mumbai startup into a publicly listed global AdTech platform operating across more than 10 international markets.

Founded by Tejas Rathod and Kunal Kothari, with Ishank Joshi joining later as the third founder, Mobavenue has grown from a digital marketing agency established in 2017 into a product-led AI company with over 200 employees serving more than 150 brands. Listed in 2025, the company has continued investing in its proprietary GMP 360 technology stack while expanding its presence in the US, UK and Singapore.



The newly launched Mobavenue Neural Engine integrates campaign planning, execution, creative intelligence and conversational reporting into a unified AI ecosystem. According to the company, marketers can generate customised media plans, launch campaigns in under 59 seconds, create AI-powered advertis-

ing creatives and obtain instant performance insights through natural language queries. Founder, MD and CEO Ishank Joshi said the platform reflects the industry’s shift towards AI-driven decision-making, while Founder and CTO Tejas Rathod said it eliminates fragmented workflows, enabling marketers to focus

on strategy and business growth.

To commemorate the milestone, Mobavenue showcased its refreshed brand identity at New York’s Times Square following its recent US expansion. Chairman and COO Kunal Kothari said the display symbolised the company’s journey from Mumbai to

global markets and its ambition to build AI-powered advertising infrastructure for brands worldwide. The company has adopted the tagline “connecting what’s next”, signalling its focus on predictive intelligence and measurable business outcomes.

Kolkata’s fast-growing digital economy presents significant opportunities for AI-driven advertising platforms such as Mobavenue. Businesses across retail, real estate, education, healthcare and consumer goods are increasingly shifting marketing budgets towards digital channels, creating demand for faster campaign execution and data-backed decision-making. Industry experts believe integrated AI platforms that optimise advertising efficiency and customer engagement could help Kolkata-based brands improve marketing returns while strengthening their competitiveness in regional and national markets.

ASCI's record voluntary compliance signals stronger trust in India's advertising ecosystem

Kolkata: The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has recorded its highest-ever voluntary compliance rate of 99.7 per cent in the first quarter of FY2026-27, reflecting a growing commitment among advertisers, agencies, influencers and digital platforms to responsible advertising and consumer protection.

According to ASCI, marketers promptly modified or withdrew advertisements following its recommendations, despite the fragmented and fast-moving nature of India’s digital advertising ecosystem. The compliance rate marks a sharp improvement from 86 per cent in FY2025-26 and 83 per cent in FY2024-25, underscoring the increasing acceptance of self-regulation across the industry.

During the quarter, ASCI processed 1,616 cases involving 1,089 advertisements, including 179 influencer advertisements, highlighting its continued focus on the rapidly evolving digital advertising landscape. While print and television advertising have traditionally maintained high compliance levels, the latest figures indicate that digital advertising is now approaching similar standards, representing a significant shift for the sector.

ASCI said the results demonstrate that advertisers of all sizes, along with influencers, are embracing transparent and truthful communication, recognising that consumer trust has become a key business imperative rather than merely a regulatory requirement.

Manisha Kapoor, CEO and

Secretary General of ASCI, said the record compliance rate reflects the industry’s commitment to responsible advertising and validates India’s self-regulatory framework. She added that ASCI would continue supporting innovation while ensuring consumer interests remain central to advertising practices.

In Kolkata, the improved compliance environment is expected to benefit the city’s growing digital marketing, e-commerce and startup ecosystem, where brands increasingly rely on influencer-led campaigns and online advertising. Stronger adherence to advertising standards could enhance consumer confidence, encourage responsible brand communication and create a more credible marketplace for businesses targeting eastern India.

Scaler student from West Bengal bags Singapore internship with Rs 2 lakh monthly stipend



Kolkata: Scaler School of Technology (SST) has strengthened its industry placement credentials after one of its students from West Bengal secured a software engineering internship in Singapore with a monthly stipend of 3,000 Singapore Dollars (around Rs 2 lakh) through an exclusive campus hiring drive. Sourashis Sarkar from Barrackpore was selected by Singapore-based HealthTech startup Neurowyzz following a multi-stage recruitment process involving over 100 SST students.

The three-month on-site internship, held from August to October 2025, exposed Sourashis to enterprise software integration projects for healthcare institutions across South-

east Asia. As a Backend Engineering Intern, he worked on integrating Neurowyzz’s patented digital brain functioning and cognitive screening platform with hospital systems. The selection process included assessments in data structures and algorithms (DSA), machine coding, backend fundamentals and technical interviews, with only two students ultimately securing the opportunity.

Sourashis, who developed an interest in coding during the COVID-19 lockdown, credited SST’s industry-focused curriculum and strong foundation in DSA and backend development for helping him succeed in a global engineering environment. Beyond academics, he co-founded Delta Education, a platform

supporting admissions to tech-first colleges, which has generated nearly Rs 10 lakh in revenue since its launch in early 2025. He also qualified for the ICPC Regional Programming Contest in 2024.

The achievement reflects the growing demand for industry-ready technology talent from eastern India. With Kolkata emerging as a key education and technology hub, students are increasingly securing global internships and employment opportunities through specialised, industry-linked institutions. The trend is expected to encourage greater investment in technology education and strengthen the city’s position as a talent pipeline for international startups and digital enterprises.

Kerakoll strengthens H40 portfolio to capture growing demand for premium tile adhesives

Kolkata: Kerakoll is strengthening its position in India’s premium construction chemicals market with the expansion of its flagship H40 family of tile adhesives, introducing H40 Extreme and H40 Tech alongside its established H40 Gel. The move comes as demand for high-performance adhesive systems rises with the increasing adoption of large-format tiles, advanced installation techniques and modern construction practices across the country.

The company said H40 Gel continues to serve as the cornerstone of its adhesive portfolio, having established itself as a benchmark product through superior workability, durability and multi-purpose application. Its proprietary gel technology provides optimal consistency, total wettability and enhanced adhesion, making it suitable for a broad range of tile fixing applications. The newly launched H40 Extreme and H40 Tech are engineered for heavy-duty and large-format installations, offering enhanced strength, precision and



long-term reliability. Both products will be distributed through select channel partners to ensure specialised technical support and product expertise.

Regional Director – Asia Pacific, Kerakoll, Ahzam Javed, said the expansion builds on the legacy of H40 Gel and reflects the company’s commitment to delivering next-generation adhesive solutions that improve precision, durability and efficiency. Senior Product Manager, Kera-

koll India, Abisanka Sinha, said the new additions address the evolving needs of professionals working on demanding tile and stone applications while bringing advanced technology and practical, site-ready solutions to the Indian market.

The launch is expected to strengthen Kerakoll’s presence in eastern India, where Kolkata continues to witness steady growth in residential, commercial and infrastructure development. Market participants

say the increasing use of premium tiles in high-rise housing projects, office spaces, retail developments and hospitality projects is driving demand for advanced adhesive solutions. The expanded H40 family is likely to benefit architects, contractors and applicators seeking reliable, sustainable and high-performance products, positioning Kerakoll to capitalise on the region’s evolving construction materials market.

Stock Markets Plunge in Early Session as Widespread Selling Erases Gains

Mumbai: Domestic equity benchmark indices recorded sharp declines during early market hours as intensive selling pressure swept across major banking, financial, and technology stocks amid weak global cues and persistent foreign capital outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 523 points to trade at 77,628, while the broader 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 134 points to 24,198 in an aggressive early pullback. Financial analysts attributed the swift market correction to sustained institutional selling, heightened geopolitical tensions, and investor caution ahead of key corporate quarterly earnings reports and macroeconomic indicators.

Selling was particularly pronounced in market heavyweights across the banking, auto, and IT sectors, pulling mid-cap and small-cap indices lower in tandem. Market strategists noted that short-term market sentiment remains fragile, with elevated volatility expected to persist as institutional investors await clearer signals from central banks regarding interest rate trajectories and global growth forecasts.

Trump’s Ceasefire Dilemma: Why Washington Is Reluctant to Pause the Iran Conflict

Washington : A proposed ceasefire between the United States and Iran has created a possible diplomatic opening, but Washington appears reluctant to halt military operations at a moment when it believes continued pressure could improve its negotiating position. Regional powers have been working to bring both sides to the negotiating table, yet more than two weeks into the renewed conflict, there are few signs that US Presi-



dent Donald Trump is prepared to immediately accept a pause in hostilities. The ceasefire proposal, reportedly supported by Qatar, Oman, Egypt, and Pakistan, calls for a temporary 10-day halt in fighting to create space for diplomatic discussions. The plan is not intended as a final peace agreement but as a confidence-building measure that could allow negotiations on broader political and security issues. However, the Trump administration has not publicly endorsed the proposal, with officials suggesting that Washington believes military pressure has not yet achieved the desired level of leverage over Teh-

ran. The central calculation behind the US position is that continued pressure could strengthen America’s hand before formal negotiations begin. Despite days of US strikes against Iranian military and strategic targets, Tehran has so far avoided taking actions that could trigger a wider confrontation, including shutting the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world’s most important energy routes. The narrow waterway is responsible for a significant share of global oil shipments, and any prolonged disruption could create major economic consequences worldwide. Washington reportedly views Iran’s restraint as an opportunity to maintain pressure while assessing whether further military action could force Tehran into a weaker negotiating position. US officials believe entering talks without sufficient leverage could limit their ability to secure favourable outcomes. Tehran, meanwhile, appears equally determined not to negotiate from a position it considers vulnerable. The possibility of an immediate

ceasefire became even more complicated following an Iranian missile strike in Jordan that killed two US service members. The incident strengthened calls in Washington for a tougher response and made diplomatic de-escalation politically more difficult. Instead of moving quickly toward negotiations, the attack reinforced arguments within the administration that Iran must face continued pressure before meaningful talks can begin. approach has allowed it to maintain communication with both Washington and Tehran. Qatar has also emerged as an influential regional mediator while hosting a major US military facility and maintaining working relations with Iran. Egypt’s involvement reflects its broader role in Middle Eastern diplomacy and its interest in preventing regional instability. Pakistan’s participation carries additional significance because of its geographical position and relationships with multiple regional actors. Sharing a border with Iran while maintaining ties with Gulf countries and the United States, Islamabad has an interest in preventing the conflict from spreading across the region. Beyond ending immediate military exchanges, the ceasefire effort is focused on preventing wider economic and geopolitical consequences. The Strait of Hormuz remains a major concern because any prolonged disruption could affect global energy supplies, increase oil prices, and create economic challenges for countries dependent on imports. Major economies, including India, would be closely affected by instability in one of the world’s most important energy corridors. The current situation reflects a familiar challenge in international diplomacy: both sides must believe they have more to gain from negotiations than from continuing conflict. Washington appears to believe that additional pressure may produce better terms, while Tehran is unlikely to accept talks if it believes doing so would signal weakness. This creates a difficult environment for mediators attempting to secure even a temporary pause. The success of the ceasefire proposal will ultimately depend on whether the United States and Iran can overcome concerns about appearing to compromise under pressure. For now, diplomacy remains possible but uncertain. Regional mediators continue to push for dialogue, while both Washington and Tehran weigh the risks of continuing the conflict against the potential benefits of negotiation.

Pickaxe Mountain: The Underground Site at the Heart of the Iran Nuclear Crisis

Washington: Concerns over Iran’s nuclear ambitions have intensified after Israeli intelligence claimed that Tehran moved thousands of uranium-enrichment centrifuges into the heavily fortified Pickaxe Mountain facility, raising questions about whether Iran is attempting to rebuild parts of its nuclear programme following recent military strikes. According to reports citing Israeli and US officials, the centrifuges were transferred to underground tunnels at Pickaxe Mountain near the damaged Natanz nuclear facility. Israel reportedly shared the intelligence with Washington, arguing that Iran could use the deeply buried complex to restore its enrichment capabilities while protecting critical equipment from further attacks. The development comes as the United States has increased military pressure on Iran, with President Donald Trump identifying Pickaxe Mountain as a possible future target. Trump has warned that Washington could strike the underground facility, describing it as a potential location for a major military operation against Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. Located near Natanz, Pickaxe Mountain is one of Iran’s most secure nuclear-related sites. Built deep beneath mountains and protected by extensive underground tunnels, the facility was developed after damage to Iran’s previous centrifuge assembly infrastructure. Experts believe its depth and construction could make it difficult to destroy even with advanced bunker-penetrating weapons. Iran has repeatedly denied pursuing nuclear weapons and maintains that



its nuclear programme is intended for peaceful purposes. However, international concerns have grown because Tehran has accumulated significant quantities of uranium enriched to high levels and has limited access for international inspectors at some facilities. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has previously raised concerns about activities at Pickaxe Mountain, saying Iran had announced plans for nuclear-related work at the site but has not provided full transparency. The dispute over Pickaxe Mountain highlights the broader challenge facing diplomacy between Iran and Western powers. While Israel and the United States argue that military action may be necessary to prevent nuclear expansion, Iran insists its programme is legitimate. The uncertainty surrounding the underground facility has added another layer of tension to an already fragile regional security situation. Analysts say the controversy surrounding Pickaxe Mountain could further complicate efforts to revive diplomatic negotiations between Tehran and Western governments. Any military strike on the facility would carry significant risks, potentially triggering a wider confrontation across the Middle East and threatening energy markets. The situation also places additional pressure on international organisations seeking transparency. Without access to key nuclear sites, verification efforts remain limited, making it harder to determine the scale of Iran’s activities and intentions. For now, the future of Pickaxe Mountain remains at the centre of a growing geopolitical dispute. Whether it becomes a target for military action or a subject of renewed negotiations will depend on the choices made by Washington, Tehran, and their regional partners in the coming weeks. The uncertainty has also raised concerns among neighbouring countries, many of which fear that an escalation between Iran, Israel, and the United States could destabilise the wider region. Gulf states are closely monitoring developments because any conflict involving Iran’s nuclear infrastructure could affect trade routes, energy supplies, and regional security. Diplomatic efforts remain possible, but progress will depend on rebuilding trust between the parties. International officials continue to stress that transparency, inspections, and dialogue are essential to preventing further escalation. The coming period could prove decisive in determining whether the crisis moves toward negotiation or deeper confrontation.

Sea Clash Sparks US Concern



Manila: The United States has condemned what it described as “dangerous and aggressive” actions by China following a confrontation between Chinese maritime personnel and Philippine navy forces in the disputed South China Sea, increasing tensions between Beijing and Manila. The incident reportedly occurred near the Second Thomas Shoal, where Manila accused a Chinese coast guard officer of repeatedly striking a Filipino sailor with a wooden baton, causing injuries and damaging a Philippine navy rubber boat. The Philippines said the confrontation took place near the BRP Sierra Madre, a grounded naval outpost that has become a key symbol of Manila’s territorial claims in the contested waters. According to Philippine officials, a Chinese inflatable boat carrying eight personnel approached the outpost at close range. Manila said Chinese personnel responded aggressively when Philippine navy boats attempted to prevent the vessel from approaching the area. The US State Department criticised Beijing’s actions, with spokesman Tommy

Pigott calling on China to stop what Washington described as destabilising behaviour. The United States said the incident reflected a wider pattern of pressure against Philippine maritime operations and warned that such actions threaten regional peace and stability. “We stand with our ally, the Philippines,” Washington said, reaffirming its security commitment to Manila amid rising disputes in the South China Sea. The confrontation occurred as US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Manila for talks with foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The South China Sea dispute is expected to be a major topic of discussion, especially with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also attending regional meetings. The latest incident adds to growing concerns over repeated encounters between Chinese and Philippine vessels in the strategically important waterway. The South China Sea remains one of the world’s busiest maritime routes, with several countries holding competing territorial claims and major powers closely watching developments.

America’s New Student Visa Rules: International Students Face a Changing Immigration Landscape

Washington: International students on F-1 visas who are currently outside the United States during academic breaks have been advised to return before September 15 if they want to retain important protections under the existing immigration framework. The advisory comes ahead of a new US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) rule that will significantly change how the duration of stay is determined for foreign students. The new regulation, scheduled to take effect on September 15, will replace the long-standing “Duration of Status” (D/S) system with a fixed admission period. Under the current framework, F-1 students are generally allowed to remain in the United States for the length of their academic programme, provided they maintain valid

student status. The new system will instead require students to follow a specific admission period recorded on their I-94 arrival document. According to immigration experts, students who are physically present in the United States and maintaining valid F-1 status when the rule takes effect will continue to receive transition benefits under the existing system. However, those who remain abroad and enter the country after September 15 may be subject to the new fixed-duration rules. The change has created urgency among students who are currently travelling outside the US, including many international students visiting their home countries during academic holidays. Immigration attorneys have advised eligible students to plan their return before the

deadline to avoid losing access to the existing Duration of Status protections. Under the current system, F-1 students are admitted under D/S rather than receiving a specific end date. This allows them to stay in the country throughout their academic programme as long as they continue meeting visa requirements, including maintaining full-time enrollment and complying with immigration regulations. From September 15 onwards, however, students entering the United States will generally receive an “admit-until” date on their I-94 records. Once that period expires, students may need to apply for an extension if they remain eligible. The new process is expected to place greater importance on programme completion dates listed on Form I-20,

the official document issued by universities confirming a student’s academic status. Students already inside the United States on the effective date of the rule will receive certain transition protections. Those maintaining valid F-1 status on September 15 will continue under the existing D/S framework until the completion date listed on their Form I-20. However, immigration specialists have warned that this protection is subject to an overall four-year limit from the date the rule comes into effect. The transition provision is expected to remain available only within the defined period, with the maximum protection extending until November 14, 2030, including the existing departure grace period. Immigration experts have emphasised that students should not assume they automatically receive an additional four years of stay. Legal professionals have clarified that the four-year limit is only a maximum timeframe for maintaining D/S benefits under the transition arrangement. It does not provide an automatic extension of a student’s programme or visa status. Students must continue meeting all F-1 requirements, and any violation of status could result in loss of immigration benefits. Another major concern relates to international travel after September 15. Students who leave the United States after the new rule takes effect and later return may no

longer be admitted under the traditional D/S system. Instead, they could receive a fixed admission period based on the information in their I-20 document, along with revised departure conditions. Immigration experts have described the advantage of returning before September 15 as significant but limited. While being physically present in the US on the effective date can help students retain existing protections, future international travel could change the way their admission period is calculated. The DHS has released guidance materials, including fact sheets and frequently asked questions, explaining how the transition will affect current and future international students. Universities and immigration advisers are also encouraging students to review their individual circumstances carefully before making travel decisions. The policy change represents one of the most significant adjustments to the management of F-1 student immigration status in recent years. While officials argue that the new system will provide clearer timelines and improve administrative oversight, many international students and education institutions are concerned about the additional uncertainty it may create. For students planning to continue their education in the United States, maintaining valid status, understanding travel implications, and staying informed about the

new rules will be essential. With the September 15 deadline approaching, immigration advisers are urging students abroad to consider returning early if they wish to benefit from the existing Duration of Status framework. International students and universities are closely monitoring the upcoming changes as the United States prepares to move away from the traditional Duration of Status system for F-1 visa holders. The reform is expected to introduce stricter timelines and require students to pay greater attention to their immigration records throughout their academic journey. Education experts have warned that the new framework could create additional administrative challenges for students who need flexibility due to research extensions, delayed graduation, internships, or changes in academic programmes. Under the current system, students generally have more flexibility because their stay is connected to maintaining valid academic status rather than a fixed admission date. Universities are expected to increase support services to help international students understand the new requirements, including monitoring I-94 records, maintaining accurate Form I-20 information, and applying for extensions when necessary. Advisers are also encouraging students to avoid travel disruptions and ensure that all immigration documents remain updated.



KMC works without a pause to redesign wards borough teams will present reports on July 23



Kolkata, July 21: The Kolkata Municipal Corporation, which is frequently chastised for delays in answering municipal concerns, is operating on a war footing, with officials forsaking weekly breaks to complete the city’s ward delimitation by a tight deadline.Borough-level teams have till Thursday to submit their reports to a central committee, which will prepare a city-wide report and present it to KMC administrator Smita Pandey on Sunday. Pandey will evaluate the findings and transmit it to the state government, which is anticipated to publish a draft of the altered ward borders by July 31. The 144-ward civic area is set to have around 200 wards after the exercise.Officials said the

teams are submitting daily progress reports and have been instructed to adhere to the deadlines. “The borough teams have only three days to file their reports. A central team comprising senior engineers and officials will compile a report for all of Calcutta and submit it to the administrator by July 26,” a KMC official said on Monday. The delimitation exercise began on July 10. “It is a mammoth exercise, and we have very little time,” an official said.State government officials and the KMC decided that all wards should have broadly similar voter strength — between 14,000 and 18,000 electors. At present, voter strength varies from ward to ward.Some wards in Shyampukur and Burrabazar have

only 12,000 to 15,000 voters, while Ward 66 in Topsia has more than 80,000 and Ward 109 in Mukundapur about 45,000, sources said. The KMC covers 206sqkm and has around 32 lakh voters.“There need to be about 200 wards if each has between 14,000 and 18,000 voters. The boundaries are being redrawn based on this,” an official said.Borough teams have been tasked with verifying on the ground whether the proposed boundaries comply with the guidelines. Roads should serve as ward boundaries, all voters of a polling booth should be from one ward, and newly created wards should stay within the same Assembly constituency.“The borough teams are examining whether the maps drawn on the table strictly follow these guidelines. Field visits may reveal discrepancies, requiring the boundaries to be redrawn,” an official said. The central delimitation committee will examine issues flagged by the borough teams before preparing the final map for around 200 wards. Sources said a ward such as Topsia’s Ward 66 could be split into five. Officials said ward sizes will vary because areas such as Dalhousie and Dhapa have relatively few voters despite covering large geographical stretches.The last major expansion of the civic body’s boundar-ies came in 2012, when parts of Joka — now wards 142, 143 and 144 — were brought under the KMC. Earlier expansions took place in the early 1980s, when Behala, Jadavpur and Garden Reach were added and some ward boundaries were redrawn, and around Independence, when Cossipore and Tollygunge were merged with the then Corporation of Calcutta.

Heavy rain floods the north and drizzles the south, causing airline delays and traffic jams

Kolkata, July 21: On Monday afternoon, the city’s north and northern outskirts were pelted by blinding rain, delaying flights and paralysing traffic on the roads. At least four flights heading for Calcutta were diverted, while more than a dozen departures were delayed by up to an hour, according to airport officials. Traffic crawled along VIP Road late into the evening, even after the showers had subsided. Several people missed their flights. The arrival area outside the terminal building and even the parking lot remained waterlogged for hours.While north Calcutta received heavy rain, south Calcutta received light showers. A Met official attributed the uneven distribution of rain to differences in moisture convergence. “The moisture convergence was heavier over North 24-Parganas and north Calcutta. Some pockets of South 24-Parganas, neighbouring Bangladesh, also saw heavy moisture convergence. The rain was heavy in these areas. South Calcutta had relatively less moisture convergence,” said H.R. Biswas, head of the Regional Meteorological Centre in Alipore.Calcutta often sees uneven rain distribution during the pre-monsoon squall season, with some areas remaining dry while others are drenched. “That is unlikely in monsoon. It rained across the city, but the south got light rain. The sky was consistently cloudy,”



Biswas said.Civic pumping station readings showed Maniktala received 70mm of rain, Ultadanga 71mm, College Square 74mm and Tangra 99mm. At the same time, Alipore recorded around 25mm.In Met parlance, 60mm of rain in 24 hours qualifies as heavy rain. VIP Road, College Street, several stretches of Central Avenue near Yogayog Bhavan and Bowbazar, as well as parts of Salt Lake and New Town, were inundated. A Behala resident took more than three hours to drive home from her office in New Town on Monday evening. A resident of a gated community on VIP Road was about to leave for her office in central Calcutta when it started raining. “Soon, the stretch till the main entrance was under ankle-deep water. VIP Road was also submerged. I could not step out,” she said. The Met office has forecast more rain across the state in the coming days. The citis likely to receive light to

moderate rain.“The upper air cyclonic circulation over north Jharkhand and adjoining Bihar extending up to 1.5km above mean sea level persists. A trough runs from the above upper-air cyclonic circulation to Tripura across north Gangetic West Bengal and Bangladesh, extending up to 1.5km above mean sea level. The monsoon trough at mean sea level now passes through Sri Ganganagar, Rohtak, Hardoi, Varanasi, Daltonganj, Purulia, Digha and thence southeastwards towards northeast Bay of Bengal,” the Met bulletin said. According to meteorologists, the first two systems caused significant rain in north Bengal, but the monsoon trough was the primary cause of rain in south Bengal.The report predicted heavy rain in North and South 24-Parganas, East Midnapore, West Burdwan, and Bankura on Wednesday and Thursday. Calcutta is likely to receive light to moderate rainfall.

Why Write to Husband’s Employer in a Divorce Case The Supreme Court condemns the ‘practice’



New Delhi, July 21: Should a wife include her husband’s employer in a divorce dispute?The Supreme Court has voiced worry about wives writing to their husbands’ employers during marital litigation, pointing out that such complaints could result in job loss and, ultimately, affect maintenance claims.A bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and R. Mahadevan made the statement last week while hearing a transfer petition filed by a woman seeking to transfer a defamation suit filed against her by her husband’s friend from Assam to Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. The wife sought the transfer on the ground that she was already engaged in multiple litigations against her husband in Ghaziabad.Justice Nagarathna observed that many wives were adopting the course of writing to their husbands’ employers, leading to termination of employment. She remarked that while seeking a divorce was one thing, causing the loss of

a spouse’s livelihood was worse.During the hearing, counsel for the wife submitted that she was already involved in multiple litigations with her husband in Ghaziabad, and that a defamation case had been filed against her at the instance of her husband by his close friend and colleague.The defamation case arose from a representation the wife had made to Air Force authorities in Delhi, alleging that her husband, an Air Force officer, was running an independent business in violation of service rules. Responding to this, Justice Nagarathna remarked that writing to a spouse’s employer during matrimonial disputes was “one of the worst things” a wife could do, since it could cost the husband his job and leave little basis for any future maintenance claim. Counsel for the wife submitted that the representation to the Air Force authorities had been made only after the husband filed a false complaint alleging theft of

Air Force articles, specifically accusing the wife and her brother of stealing an Air Force helmet.He said the representation was made to ascertain the whereabouts of the article after it had been allotted, and clarified that the defamation case had not been filed by the husband himself but by his friend.The court referred the matter to the Supreme Court Mediation Centre to explore the possibility of a settlement between the parties. Justice Nagarathna also asked counsel for the wife to advise her to resolve all disputes and withdraw the allegationsResponding to this, Justice Nagarathna remarked that writing to a spouse’s employer during matrimonial disputes was “one of the worst things” a wife could do, since it could cost the husband his job and leave little basis for any future maintenance claim.Counsel for the wife submitted that the representation to the Air Force authorities had been made only after the husband filed a false complaint alleging theft of Air Force articles, specifically accusing the wife and her brother of stealing an Air Force helmet. He said the representation was made to ascertain the whereabouts of the article after it had been allotted, and clarified that the defamation case had not been filed by the husband himself but by his friend.The court referred the matter to the Supreme Court Mediation Centre to explore the possibility of a settlement between the parties. Justice Nagarathna also asked counsel for the wife to advise her to resolve all disputes and withdraw the allegations.

“Preventing Paper Leaks A National Responsibility” PM Modi On The NEET Row

New Delhi, July 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanded the harshest possible punishment for those responsible for the NEET paper leak, emphasising that preventing such leaks was a national responsibility, according to Minister Kiren Rijiju, speaking after the NDA Parliamentary Party’s ‘Mangal Milan’ meeting on Tuesday. Rijiju, the Prime Minister, emphasised the importance of working together to create a reliable examination system.The Prime Minister urged NDA partners to remain united in their support for legislative business and urged opposition parties to work constructively in parliament, stating that while political differences may exist, all MPs have a shared responsibility to work for the country’s future and the welfare of its youth,” Rijiju quoted the Prime Minister. The statements came a day after hundreds of demonstrators were tear-gassed, lathicharged, and prevented from marching to parliament. The protesting students, led by the satirical Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), formed in May after the Supreme Court Chief Justice compared some unemployed young people to “cockroaches” during an unrelated hearing, are calling for Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan’s resignation in the wake of alleged irregularities in competitive examinations, including the NEET paper leak. The National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) is one of the nation’s most difficult exams, drawing almost two million aspiring doctors. The exam was cancelled in May after claims that the question paper had been leaked in advance. The re-test was completed late last month.

Sukhbir Badal Summoned Again In Punjab Sacrilege Row; 2015 Case Still Unresolved

Chandigarh, July 21: Sukhbir Singh Badal, president of the Shiromani Akali Dal and former Punjab deputy chief minister, appeared before a special police team on Monday in connection with the 2015 sacrilege and police firing cases, becoming the latest high-profile political leader to be questioned in one of the state’s most politically sensitive investigations.The grilling comes nearly 11 years after the sacrilege episodes rocked Punjab and changed the state’s political landscape. Despite several investigations, changes in administration, and repeated political promises, no one has been convicted in the major sacrilege and police firing instances. For many in Punjab, the repeated summonses and new probes have raised the question of whether the case has become more of a political matter than a criminal investigation.An probe that has outlasted three governments.Since 2015, the sacrilege charges have survived three governments: the Akali Dal-BJP combination, the Congress, and the current AAP administration led by Bhagwant Mann. Every government pledged justice.Each government launched new enquiries or ordered further probes.However, eleven years later, the cases remain unresolved.Over the years, five SITs, or Special Investigation Teams, formed by the Punjab Police, as well as a CBI team, have undertaken investigations. However, successive governments have failed to pursue the cases to their logical conclusion, leaving justice elusive for the victims’

relatives. Congress made it a poll promise tooThe sacrilege issue became the defining political issue of the 2017 Punjab election.The Congress campaigned aggressively on the promise of delivering justice to the victims and holding those responsible accountable. The issue was widely seen as one of the biggest reasons behind the defeat of the Shiromani Akali Dal after a decade in power.However, despite governing Punjab for five years between 2017 and 2022, the Congress government could not secure a single conviction in the main sacrilege or police firing cases.Fresh SITs were constituted and investigations continued. But the promised closure never came. AAP’s turn; identical questions. When the Aam Aadmi Party took office in 2022, it pledged fast justice in the sacrilege cases. And for the last four and a half years, the Mann administration has repeatedly emphasised that those involved will not be spared.The probe has resulted in new questioning of political leaders, notably Sukhbir Badal, and increased action by the SIT. However, critics note out that, after several rounds of questioning and fresh summons, the inquiry has yet to result in convictions or a legal decision.The opposition has accused the government of manipulating the case for political purposes, while the AAP insists that it is conducting the probe in accordance with the law. The backgroundThe sacrilege events began on June 1, 2015, when a bir (copy) of the Guru Granth Sahib was stolen from the Burj Jawahar Singh Wala vil-

lage gurdwara. Three derogatory posters threatening sacrilege were pasted at Bargari and Burj Jawahar Singh Wala villages between September 26 and 27, 2015.On October 12, 2015, torn pages of the bir were found scattered in front of a gurdwara in the adjoining Bargari village, triggering outrage across Punjab. On October 14, 2015, police opened fire at two places on people protesting against the sacrilege of the Guru Granth Sahib. At Behbal Kalan, two protesters died due to bullet injuries, while at Kotkapura more than 50 people were injured. All these incidents took place in Faridkot district. The firing sparked widespread public outrage and intensified political tensions.The incidents are viewed as one of the principal reasons behind the Akali Dal’s defeat in the 2017 election, reflecting public anger over the government’s handling of the crisis. Sukhbir Badal’s appearance before the SIT is likely to keep the politically sensitive issue alive, particularly with Punjab moving closer to another Assembly election. But the larger question remains unchanged. After eleven years, six investigations, multiple SITs, a CBI probe, and three successive administrations, Punjab still awaits the one solution that victims’ families have continuously demanded: a legal conclusion supported by convictions.Until then, every new summons may make political headlines, but it is unlikely to address the issue that has lingered since 2015: Who will finally bring justice in one of Punjab’s most important cases?

Punjab Farmers to Participate in Rally Against India-US Trade Deal Today

New Delhi, July 21: Farmers from throughout Punjab will protest the proposed India-US trade deal on July 21 at Kisan Ghat in Delhi, according to a farmer leader.Sarwan Singh Pandher, leader of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, stated that farmers from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan will travel to the national capital to attend the rally.The demonstration is being held under the banner of ‘Desh Bachao Morcha’. They said that by allowing cheaper agricultural imports into India, the India-US trade pact will harm farmers, agricultural labourers, livestock rearers, small traders, and the country’s agricultural industry. Pandher claimed that the proposed agreement will not be limited to a few commodities but may encompass agriculture, dairy, industry, digital trade, e-commerce, government procurement, intellectual property rights, and the services sector. Farmers have urged the Centre to cancel the proposed trade treaty and protect their and the ordinary people’s interests.

118 cops were injured and 70 were detained after a CJP protest became violent in Delhi

New Delhi, July 21: On Monday, the Cockroach Janta Party’s (CJP) “Sansad Chalo” protest march got violent in the New Delhi area, injuring over 118 police personnel, including several senior officials, and detaining over 70 demonstrators, authorities claimed.Delhi Police issued a statement accusing protesters of “unruly, aggressive and violent behaviour” throughout the protest, including attacks on security personnel, damage to government vehicles, and public property.During today’s CJP rally in New Delhi, the protesters were disorderly, aggressive, and violent. Despite repeated warnings and lawful commands from the police, they refused to disperse and deliberately disregarded the prohibitory orders in place,” according to the police statement. The protesters attacked police personnel with stones and other objects, attempted to breach police barricades, vandalised police and other government vehicles, damaged public property, and resorted to large-scale violence, posing a serious threat to public order, the security arrangements in place, and the safety of police personnel performing their lawful duties, it read.Police said more than 118 police personnel sustained injuries in the violence, including senior officers of the ranks of Special Commissioner of Police, Joint Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police and Assistant Commissioner of Police, besides several women police personnel. “During the scuffle, around 60 protesters were also reported to get injured. The medico-legal examination (MLC) of



the remaining injured police personnel is underway,” the statement said.According to the police, the violent mob also caused extensive damage to public property.“The violent mob also caused extensive damage to public property. Around 15 to 20 government vehicles, along with other government property, were vandalised during the incident,” it added.Police said around 70 protesters have been detained and legal proceedings have been initiated.“Around 70 protesters have been detained. Appropriate legal action is being initiated, and an FIR is being registered under the relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and other applicable laws for rioting, assault on public servants, damage to public property and other offences committed during the protest,” the statement said. Reiterating its commitment to maintaining law and order, Delhi Police said strict action would be taken against all those found involved in unlawful and violent activities.

Campuses erupt over the Delhi crackdown; students hold protest marches and hunger strikes in solidarity

Jadavpur , July 21: On Monday, police violence against demonstrators in New Delhi triggered fury across Calcutta’s colleges.Hundreds of Jadavpur University students marched in protest, protesting what they called “police brutality on a peaceful protest”. Students, teachers and research scholars walked from the 8B bus terminus to Golpark, around 2.6km away.It was the first major rally by JU students and teachers since the BJP came to power in Bengal in early May. Many protesters raised

slogans demanding the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, alleging that the Centre was “crushing the future of India’s youth”. At Presidency University, students stood on waterlogged College Street to register their protest.Students of Medical College Kolkata observed a 12-hour hunger strike on the campus in solidarity with the movement at Jantar Mantar. At the JU rally, many carried posters of Sonam Wangchuk, who had been on a 21-day hunger strike demanding,

among other things, Pradhan’s resignation before being forcibly removed by police and admitted to a government hospital. The protests in Delhi have drawn support from campuses across the country.The JU students carried posters that read: “Rest or Protest?” and “You lock our saints, you leak our tests. The youth will rise and never rest.”Anushna Das, a postgraduate student, said: “Several students have died by suicide because of the incompetence of the NTA.

Siddharth Anand’s king heads to final overseas location to wrap shoot



Mumbai : Shah Rukh Khan’s King is one of the most anticipated films of the year, and while the excitement around it grows, fans can’t wait to see the action thriller on the big screen, with every update making them even more thrilled. A new report suggests that the major shoot of the film has been wrapped, and there is only one major international schedule remaining before the team calls it a wrap.

As per Mid-Day, the final schedule of the film may commence in August. While discussions are happening within the production team to explore shooting locations in

the United States and several countries in South America, nothing has been officially confirmed. As per a source quoted by the publication, “Only an international schedule is remaining. Nothing has been officially locked yet, but a team is currently in the US, scouting locations and working out the logistics. They will head to certain countries in South America before zeroing in on the locations. If all goes according to plan, the unit will head there next month before calling it a wrap.”

The source further added that director Siddharth Anand and Shah Rukh Khan are will-

ing to explore new locations that have not been widely explored on screen. The source added, “Shah Rukh and Siddharth wanted an untapped location for the sequence in question.” King was officially announced in November last year. The electrifying title reveal, dropped on November 2 to mark Shah Rukh Khan’s birthday, introduced his silver-haired, action-driven look, an SRK-special theme song, and a striking dialogue delivered by SRK: “Darr nahi, dehshat hoon,” setting off a frenzy across media platforms. With the title reveal, anticipation for the film continues to soar.

Produced by Red Chillies Entertainment and Marflix Pictures, King marks Shah Rukh Khan’s first on-screen collaboration with his daughter, Suhana Khan. As per reports, King sees SRK as a seasoned assassin operating within the dark underworld, while Suhana plays his protégé, training for dangerous missions.

Amaal Mallik on Arijit Singh’s comeback song for Awarapan 2 after retirement

Mumbai : Music composer Amaal Mallik has opened up about Arijit Singh’s return to playback singing with a song from Emraan Hashmi’s upcoming film Awarapan 2. He revealed that the singer agreed to record the track last week after connecting with the melody. Amaal clarified that the song was not part of any old agreement or a previously recorded commitment. He said the composition was shared with Arijit a few months ago, and the singer gave his final approval only recently. For the unversed, Arijit announced his retirement from playback singing on January 27, which is why his return to playback singing with the sing ‘Yeh Awarapan’ has left fans pleasantly surprised!

Taking to social media, Amaal wrote that Arijit’s decision was driven primarily by his love and respect for their bond as artists and friends. He added that the

singer’s admiration for the film’s producers and lead actor also played a role in the decision. “One last time I’m stating this, This song is not some old agreement or something that was already sung and he came to redo it. This melody was sent a few months back and he has literally agreed only and last week to sing it,” wrote Amaal.

He further added, “It’s mainly his love for me as an artist & friend, then comes his respect for the producers and the actor of the film. If the melody doesn’t touch his heart he will not take up the song.... That’s the truth and the only truth. Now wait for the magic to unfold.” In another tweet, Amaal wrote, “Only a pure melody could get the beast out of his den. A vocal performance to watch out for.... #ArijitSingh gives his heart and soul yet again for the title song of #Awarapan2. It doesn’t get bigger



than this.”

The statement comes months after Arijit Singh had announced that he would step away from playback singing, leading fans to believe that his Bollywood singing assignments would become limited. However, the singer had clarified that his decision was not about leaving music altogether but about

exploring other aspects of his musical journey. Vishesh Films and Arijit Singh have collaborated on several projects over the years, including Phir Mohabbat in Murder 2, Tum Hi Ho from Aashiqui 2, Muskurane from CityLights, the Khamoshiyan title track, the Hamari Adhuri Kahani title track, and Pal from Jalebi.

Awarapan 2 brings Emraan

Hashmi back in the lead role as Shivam Pandit. The sequel also stars Disha Patani and Shabana Azmi in key roles. Backed by Vishesh Films, the film is directed by Nitin Kakkar, who is known for films such as Filmistaan, Ram Singh Charlie, and Notebook. Awarapan 2 is slated for a grand theatrical release on August 14, 2026.

Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai release date locked with intriguing new glimpse



Mumbai : After years of anticipation, director Ram’s ambitious fantasy drama Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai has finally locked its theatrical release date. The makers announced on Monday that the film will hit cinemas on October 1, unveiling a fresh glimpse that offers audiences another peek into the filmmaker’s mysterious new world.

Known for crafting deeply philosophical and emotionally layered stories in films such as Kattradhu Thamizh, Thanga Meengal, Taramani and Peranbu, Ram appears to be venturing into unfamiliar territory with Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai. While his signature introspective storytelling remains evident, the film promises an unusual

blend of fantasy, drama and dark humour. The story revolves around an 8000-year-old immortal, portrayed by Nivin Pauly, whose seemingly endless existence takes an unexpected turn after he crosses paths with an ordinary 32-year-old man, played by Soori. Their meeting aboard a moving train sets off a chain of bizarre and unpredictable events, with even a rat becoming an unlikely participant in the unfolding chaos. The newly released glimpse hints at the film’s offbeat tone without giving away too much of its larger mystery.

Anjali, who was recently seen in Ram’s Paranthu Po alongside Shiva, Grace Antony and Aju Varghese, plays one of the film’s central characters. The actress

reunites with the filmmaker once again, continuing a creative association that has already delivered memorable performances. Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai also marks an important milestone in Nivin Pauly’s career. The Malayalam star returns to Tamil cinema after nearly eight years, having last headlined Richie in 2017. Over the years, Nivin has largely focused on Malayalam projects, but this collaboration with Ram has remained one of the most anticipated films in his lineup ever since it was first announced.

The actor has already had two releases this year with Baby Girl and Prathichaya, and has several interesting projects lined up. Among them is Bakkiyaraj Kannan’s

Benz, which also stars Raghava Lawrence. Soori, meanwhile, continues to strengthen his position as a leading actor after successfully transitioning from comedy to emotionally driven lead roles. Fresh from Maaman, he will also be seen in Mandaadi, adding another performance-driven project to his growing filmography.

As with many of Ram’s films, music plays a significant role in shaping the emotional landscape of the narrative. Long-time collaborator Yuvan Shankar Raja has composed the soundtrack for Yezhu Kadal Yezhu Malai, continuing one of Tamil cinema’s most enduring director-composer partnerships. Behind the camera, cinematographer NK Ekambaram handles the visuals, while Mathi VS serves as editor. Action sequences have been choreographed by Silva. The film is produced by Suresh Kamatchi under the V House Productions banner. Over the years, the project has generated considerable curiosity following its festival screenings, where it drew attention for its unconventional narrative and visual ambition. With a theatrical release date now officially in place, audiences will finally get to experience one of Tamil cinema’s most intriguing long-delayed films on the big screen this October.

Diljit Dosanjh backs student protests

New Delhi : Singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh extended his support to the students protesting against alleged NEET irregularities and urged authorities to divert attention to their demands. The protest “Chalo Sansad” was organised by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Monday in New Delhi. Thousands of protestors marched towards the parliament building demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and protesting against severe exam paper leaks and education corruption.

In response to the situation, the authorities used force to disrupt the demonstrations, detaining protesters and deploying police. Dosanjh was previously asked about his comments on the protests, but the actor had distanced himself, stating he was “an artiste, not a politician”. Responding to the reason he stayed silent, the actor shared a note on his Instagram story on Tuesday and said students shouldn’t have been treated harshly. “What happened today was very wrong. Students should not have been treated like this. I request the authorities to listen to the students’ demands,” he wrote. Several celebrities have supported the students, including Hrithik Roshan, Dia Mirza, Naseeruddin Shah, Sonakshi Sinha and Shabana Azmi, among others.

Vijay's Jana Nayagan crosses ₹10 crore in advance sales



Chennai : There is no denying that actor Vijay’s Jana Nayagan is one of the most anticipated movies of the year. Fans have already begun the countdown with just two days left until the film hits the screens. Social media is buzzing, and the movie is currently trending across all platforms.

Advance bookings in Hyderabad and Tamil Nadu show incredible demand, with most tickets selling out rapidly, even for early morning shows. The mas-

sive ticket sales clearly demonstrate how eagerly the audience is waiting for the film. In fact, Jana Nayagan collected over Rs 10.60 crore shortly after ticket lines opened, resulting in houseful shows for day one. This marks Vijay’s final film before he transitions to full-time politics after serving as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

Despite facing censor delays, online leaks, and a six-month wait, the film is finally releasing in 3,500

screens after overcoming all hurdles. Jana Nayagan is expected to register an opening day collection of Rs 50 crore in India alone and Rs 75 crore globally. Based on current booking trends, these are conservative estimates, and the film could easily exceed those numbers. It remains to be seen whether Jana Nayagan will beat the record set by Vijay’s previous hit, Leo, which collected Rs 149 crore on its opening day. Let’s wait and see.

Sahiba Bali Dismisses Arjun Kapoor Dating Rumours

Mumbai : Actor and digital creator Sahiba Bali has called out media coverage surrounding her personal life and dating rumours with Arjun Kapoor, urging news outlets to shift their attention to more important issues. Her statement came after she shared a photograph from a gathering outside the High Commission of India in London, where members of the Indian community assembled in support of the Cockroach Janata Party’s (CJP) ongoing protest in India. The demonstration sought accountability and reforms in the country’s education system following the controversy over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination. Reacting to the attention her personal life has received recently, Sahiba Bali remarked that her dating life was “not national news” and appealed to the media to focus



on stories that truly deserve public attention. Along with the picture, she wrote, “Dear media stop speculating my dating life/ friendships in London- it’s not national news. But dikhana hai toh yeh dekhao na.” Sahiba’s statement comes shortly after she found herself at the centre of dating rumours with Arjun Kapoor. The speculation began after the two were spotted together at London’s iconic Lord’s Cricket Ground

during the third ODI between India and England, prompting widespread chatter on social media. Addressing the buzz soon after, Sahiba took to her Instagram Stories to share a picture with Arjun and appeared to dismiss the rumours with a cheeky caption that read, “Don’t believe everything pt 2.” The post with Arjun was a continuation of an earlier Instagram Story, in which Sahiba had shared a screenshot of a

social media post that incorrectly identified her as actress Anushka Sharma. Poking fun at the confusion, she wrote, “Don’t believe everything pt 1.” She then followed it up with the picture featuring Arjun, seemingly signalling that not every rumour or claim circulating online should be taken at face value.

Meanwhile, the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) has been staging a protest at Delhi’s Jantar Mantar since June 6, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the alleged irregularities in the NEET examination. The agitation gained wider attention after educationist and activist Sonam Wangchuk joined the demonstration with an indefinite hunger strike. He was later detained by the police and shifted to Safdarjung Hospital.

Preity Zinta Urges Dialogue Over CJP Student Protests

New Delhi: Actor Preity Zinta has urged the Central government to initiate a meaningful dialogue with activist Sonam Wangchuk and student groups amid ongoing protests in the national capital, expressing concern over Wangchuk’s health and extending her support to students demanding reforms in the education system. Taking to X on Tuesday, Zinta appealed to Wangchuk to end his hunger strike while calling on the authorities to engage with the protesters through discussions.

“I hope our govt starts a meaningful dialogue with Sonam Wangchuk and the student bodies so his health does not deteriorate any further. Please end your fast, Sonam. Your health is as important as this fight,” she wrote. The actor praised the students’ efforts, adding, “You and the students are fighting for the future of India and for our youth. My heartfelt and unwavering support to every student and to Sonam in this fight to uplift and upgrade our educational system. More power to all of you. Jai Hind.” Zinta is among several film personalities who have publicly expressed support for the student movement.

Earlier in the day, actor Sonu Sood backed the student-led protests, urging authorities to respond with empathy rather than force. He said young people deserved to have their voices heard and called for a fair and transparent resolution to concerns surrounding alleged irregularities in the NEET examination process. Veteran actor Shabana Azmi also joined the protesters at Jantar Mantar ahead of the group’s proposed



“Chalo Sansad” march. Addressing the gathering, she emphasised that peaceful protest is a constitutional right and appealed to the government to listen to the concerns raised by students. Singer and actor Diljit Dosanjh also weighed in on the issue through a detailed social media post. Condemning the violence reported during the protests, he urged authorities to engage constructively with the students instead of resorting to force. He stressed that students should be treated with dignity and called for a peaceful resolution to their demands.

Actors Prakash Raj and Riteish Deshmukh have also voiced support for the protesters in recent days, adding to growing calls from the entertainment industry for dialogue and a non-violent resolution to the ongoing standoff. The protests have continued in the national capital, with students and supporters demanding action on their grievances and urging the government to address their concerns through meaningful engagement.

Delhi braces for mass protests as farmers rally against US trade deal

Shambhu , July 21: Thousands of protesting farmers move towards Delhi for Kisan Mahapanchayat amid massive student protests rock the capital city, on Tuesday.

The Kisan Mahapanchayat is being conducted to protest the India-US trade deal. Haryana Police have erected barricades and placed cement blocks at the Shambhu border point on Tuesday morning. Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher accused the Nayab Singh Saini government of preventing them from proceeding towards Delhi.

Carrying flags of their outfits, farmers from several places in Punjab gathered at the border point in the morning to head towards the national capital. A day-long "Kisan Mahapanchayat" is being organised at Kisan Ghat in Delhi under the banner of "Desh Bachao Morcha". Heavy police deployment was made at the



Shambhu border point between Punjab and Haryana, and the bridge over the Ghaggar river was fenced to stop the farmers. Farmer leaders had earlier said that participants from several places, including those in Punjab and Haryana, would take part in the Mahapanchayat. As part of the plan, hundreds of farmers from across Punjab planned to travel to Delhi in buses. Pandher said they wanted to proceed peacefully to Delhi, but the Haryana

government was stopping them at the Shambhu border. Speaking to reporters, Pandher alleged that this exposed the "true face" of the Haryana chief minister, who frequently visits Punjab and makes tall promises to people there.

He added that farmers want the proposed India-US trade agreement to be completely scrapped. Bharatiya Kisan Union (Shaheed Bhagat Singh) leader Tejveer Singh said the Haryana Police has sealed the Shambhu border point without any prior notice. The farmers' convoy departed from Gurdwara Sri Fatehgarh Sahib on Tuesday morning. More than a thousand farmers had spent Monday night at the sarai (pilgrims' inn) of the gurdwara.

From the gurdwara, they reached Madhopur, near Sirhind on the GT Road, and then proceeded towards Shambhu. In Haryana's Kurukshetra, farmers claimed that they were stopped near Jyotisar.

Messi admits crushing defeat to Spain leaves deep scars for Argentina

East Rutherford , July 21: Lionel Messi said Argentina's World Cup final defeat by Spain had left "immense" pain but praised his team for reaching a second successive final and thanked supporters for uniting behind the national side.

Spain beat Argentina 1-0 after extra time in Sunday's final in East Rutherford, New Jersey, with Ferran Torres scoring the decisive goal to deny the 2022 champions back-to-back World Cup titles. The result ended Argentina's bid to become the first men's team since Brazil in 1962 to retain the trophy. "The pain is immense and it's go-



ing to take a long time for this wound to heal," Messi wrote on social media.

"But I'll also hold on to all the good memories... the support of an entire country which, together with the

hard work and effort of this squad, led us to be, once again, amongst the best in the world."Messi, 39, also congratulated Spain and said Argentina could take pride in reaching consecu-

tive World Cup finals. He became only the second player, after Brazil's Cafu, to appear in three men's World Cup finals, having played in the deciders in 2014, 2022 and this year. The Inter Miami forward remains Argentina's most decorated player, having led the country to the 2022 World Cup, Copa America titles in 2021 and 2024, and the 2022 Finalissima. He is also an eight-times Ballon d'Or winner and widely regarded as one of the greatest footballers. "Once again, we managed to come together as a country and stand united," Messi added, "sharing the immense pride of being Argentine."

PM Modi promises strict action on NEET paper leak

New Delhi , July 21: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday assured that those responsible for the alleged NEET paper leak would face the strictest possible punishment and urged National Democratic Alliance (NDA) lawmakers to reach out to students and reassure them that their interests would be protected.

Addressing the NDA Parliamentary Party's 'Mangal Milan' meeting, Modi emphasised that preventing examination paper leaks was a national responsibility and called for collective efforts to build a foolproof examination system, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said after the meeting. Quoting the Prime Minister, Rijiju said the government acted swiftly after reports of the NEET paper leak surfaced, leading to arrests and



prompt action against those allegedly involved. He added that the re-examination was conducted without delay to ensure students' futures were not adversely affected.

"The Prime Minister called for the strictest possible punishment for those responsible for the NEET paper leak and stressed that preventing such incidents is a national responsibility," Rijiju said. According

to people familiar with the discussions, Modi also asked NDA MPs to engage with young people and reassure them that the government remained committed to protecting their interests. He said those arrested in connection with the paper leak would face the harshest legal action while urging lawmakers to counter what he described as opposition "conspiracies" aimed at misleading

students. The Prime Minister also appealed to NDA partners to remain united in ensuring the smooth functioning of Parliament and urged opposition parties to cooperate in legislative business. While political differences may exist, all MPs share a responsibility to work for the country's future and the welfare of its youth, he said. The remarks came a day after protests over alleged examination irregularities turned violent in the national capital, where police used tear gas and lathicharge to stop demonstrators led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) from marching towards Parliament. The protesters are demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the alleged NEET paper leak and broader reforms in the examination system.

AAP condemns crackdown on CJP protests, launches support helpline

New Delhi , July 21: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday announced a helpline to provide legal and medical assistance to Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) protesters, while accusing the Centre of using excessive force during the protest crackdown in Delhi.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal alleged that the police action against the protesters was worse than the brutality witnessed during British rule and announced the launch of a dedicated helpline -, 8588833548, to assist injured protesters and the families of those detained. "The police brutality we saw on young protesters! Even the British did not unleash violence on freedom fighters similar to what the Modi government did on our own children. The videos showed that police kept beating girls and students, and lathi-charging them without any provocation," Kejriwal said.

Drawing a comparison with the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he said the scenes reminded him of General Dyer's



actions. "I want to tell the parents and family members of the protesters: You need not fear, we are with you. Send a message to the helpline number. We will get in touch, and provide legal aid and medical aid," Kejriwal said.

The former Delhi chief minister said he was unable to participate in the protest, but added that both his children

had joined the march. "Modi ji, you are the biggest anti-national in the country. You are calling our students 'anti-national' but you are unable to stop paper leaks," he added.

Kejriwal also said he would visit Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital and the Parliament Street police station later in the day.

Himachal Weather Alert: Nine Districts Warned of Flash Floods

Chandigarh: The Ministry of Earth Sciences has issued a flash flood alert for nine districts of Himachal Pradesh, while the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has sounded a red alert for very heavy to extremely heavy rainfall in parts of the state.

The flash flood alert for July 22 covers Sirmour, Chamba, Kangra, Mandi, Kullu, Shimla, Solan, Lahaul and Spiti, and Kinnaur districts. District administrations have advised people to stay away from rivers, streams and areas prone to landslides and mudslides, and avoid outdoor activities, particularly trekking. The IMD has also forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall over the next few hours in parts of Chamba, Hamirpur, Kangra, Kullu and Mandi districts.

Heavy rainfall, flash floods and increased glacier melting have severely affected road connectivity in Lahaul and Spiti district. A temporary bridge on the alternative Sansari-Killar-Thiroit-Tandi (SKTT) road was washed away after a flash flood at Jahalama nullah, disrupting traffic between Keylong



and Udaipur in Lahaul and Spiti district and Pangi valley in Chamba district. The Bailey bridge on the main SKTT road was damaged a few weeks ago and is under construction. The route serves as a key link between the Lahaul valley and Pangi. With the temporary bridge washed away, several villages in the Udaipur subdivision have been cut off from the district headquarters at Keylong, affecting the movement of people, essential supplies and agricultural produce.

Continuous rainfall and in-

creased glacier melting have also swollen the Chenab river, submerging the road bridge at Jobrang panchayat. As a result, the villages of Jobrang, Rashel and Raape have lost road connectivity. Flash floods were also reported in Shichling and Nadang, while the road between Shichling and Tabo has been blocked, disrupting vehicular movement. Deputy Commissioner of Lahaul and Spiti Kiran Bhadana said the temporary diversion at Jahalama nullah was washed away after continuous rainfall caused a sudden

rise in the water level. "In interest of public safety, the administration has prohibited the movement of all vehicles on the route until further orders," she said. She added that officials had been deployed to assess the situation and monitor restoration work. "The Border Roads Organization (BRO) has been instructed to restore the temporary road on a war-footing as soon as the water level recedes. Also has directed the agency to expedite construction of the permanent bridge over the nullah to ensure uninterrupted connectivity in the future," she said. Meanwhile, heavy rain lashed several parts of Mandi district, bringing down temperatures. The district administration said it was closely monitoring the situation in view of the red alert. In Chamba district, three labourers trapped in a flooded stream in the Holi area of Bharmour subdivision were rescued by local residents after heavy rain caused the water level to rise suddenly. The workers were stranded in the middle of the stream as the water flow increased rapidly.

Australia Restore Pat Cummins for Crucial Bangladesh Test Tour

Melbourne: Australia have named a near full-strength squad for next month's two-Test series against Bangladesh, with captain Pat Cummins returning alongside senior bowlers Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon after lengthy injury layoffs. Cricket Australia announced a 13-player squad on Monday for the World Test Championship (WTC) fixtures, with the first Test scheduled in Darwin from August 13 to 17 before the teams travel to Mackay for the second match from August 22 to 26.

Cummins' return is the biggest boost for Australia after the fast bowler missed most of the home summer because of a back stress injury. The skipper has not played international cricket since Australia's Ashes victory in Adelaide, with the third Test against England marking his only appearance across all formats over the past year. Australia will be eager to have their captain back at full fitness ahead of a demanding Test schedule. The reigning World Test Championship holders could play up to 21 Tests over the next 12 months if they qualify for another WTC final. Hazlewood and Lyon also return after extended spells on the sidelines. Hazlewood has overcome recurring hamstring and Achilles issues that have limited his workload in recent seasons, while Lyon is back after missing a significant portion of the previous campaign due to injury. Hazlewood returned to competitive cricket during this year's Indian Pre-



mier League, while Lyon has resumed bowling after completing his rehabilitation. Despite strong performances from several fringe players during the injury-hit home season, the selectors opted to restore their experienced core. All three returning bowlers are expected to spearhead Australia's attack against Bangladesh in conditions that could test both pace and spin. Michael Neser, who impressed during the Ashes while filling in for injured senior bowlers, missed out on the final squad despite consistent performances with both bat and ball. Leg-spinner Todd Murphy and fast bowler Brendan Doggett, both part of Australia's wider Test plans in recent months, were also omitted but remain in contention as standby options. The Bangladesh series will also be Australia's first Test as-

signment following Usman Khawaja's retirement, bringing an end to one of the most remarkable late-career revivals in Australian cricket. His departure leaves Australia searching for a new opening combination heading into an important phase of the WTC cycle. Chair of selectors George Bailey welcomed the return of Australia's frontline bowlers and praised their efforts during rehabilitation. "The NSP look forward to the return of Pat, Josh and Nathan. They have worked extremely hard, individually and with the SSSM teams, over the past few months to return from their respective injuries," Bailey said. He added that while the squad had been limited to 13 players, several others remained firmly in contention as Australia prepare for a busy international calendar across formats.

Supreme Court Seeks Centre's Reply on Assam NRC Appeal Process Plea

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought responses from the Centre, Assam government and other authorities on a petition seeking the immediate start of an appeal process for people excluded from the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) published in Assam.

The petition, filed by the Assam State Jamiat Ulama, was heard by a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joyma-

lya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi. During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel told the court that thousands of people excluded from the NRC were facing difficulties as the process for filing appeals had not yet begun, despite provisions allowing them to challenge their exclusion. "For those who have been excluded, there is a provision for appeal but nothing is happening," the counsel told the bench, adding that a similar

matter was already pending before the Supreme Court.

Taking note of the submissions, the bench issued notice and tagged the petition with the pending matter related to the Assam NRC process. The court has sought replies from the Centre and other respondents, including the Assam government and the office of the state NRC coordinator. The final updated NRC for Assam was published on August

31, 2019, after a lengthy verification exercise aimed at identifying genuine Indian citizens in the state. The process excluded over 19 lakh applicants from the final list. According to data released by the office of the NRC State Coordinator, a total of 3,30,27,661 people had applied for inclusion in the register. Of these, 3,11,21,004 applicants were included, while 19,06,657 people were left out.

In its plea, the Assam State Jamiat Ulama has sought directions to authorities to begin the appeal process for those excluded from the final NRC without further delay. It has also requested the issuance of national identity cards to all persons whose names were included in the final NRC under provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955 and related rules. The petition argues that eligible individuals included in the

NRC should receive official identity documents and that those excluded should be provided an effective legal mechanism to challenge the decision. The Supreme Court's notice marks the latest development in the long-running legal and administrative debate surrounding the Assam NRC exercise, which has remained a sensitive issue involving questions of citizenship, documentation and legal rights.

PV Sindhu Leads India's Challenge At China Open After Japan Triumph



New Delhi: Fresh from scripting history at the Japan Open, PV Sindhu will spearhead India's campaign at the China Open Super 1000 tournament starting on Tuesday. However, the country's challenge in the men's doubles will be without Satwiksairaj Rankiredy and Chirag Shetty, with the former continuing his recovery from a recurring shoulder injury. Sindhu heads to Changzhou in red-hot form after becoming the first Indian to win the Japan Open title, ending a 19-month wait for a major trophy. The two-time Olympic medallist enjoyed a flawless run in Tokyo, beating three-time world

champion Akane Yamaguchi 21-17, 21-17 in the final and winning all her matches in straight games. The triumph also marked Sindhu's first Super 750 title and provided a significant confidence boost ahead of the World Championships in New Delhi next month. The 2016 China Open champion will begin her campaign against compatriot Unnati Hooda. A victory could set up a second-round clash against fourth seed Chen Yu Fei, provided the Chinese star recovers from the hamstring injury that forced her to retire during the Japan Open semi-finals. Devika Sihag is the other Indian in

the women's singles draw and will face Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrungphan in the opening round. India will hope to build on a productive stretch on the BWF World Tour, with Sindhu looking to extend the form that has reignited belief in her ability to challenge the world's best once again. India's biggest absentee in China will be the star men's doubles pairing of Satwik and Chirag. The duo, who captured the Singapore Open Super 750 title last month, withdrew from the Japan Open after Satwik's troublesome shoulder injury resurfaced during their opening-round match.

Rudi Garcia Resigns As Belgium Coach Following World Cup Exit

New Delhi: Rudi Garcia will leave his role as Belgium head coach after the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) confirmed on Monday that his contract will not be renewed following the team's run to the quarter-finals of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The 62-year-old Frenchman, appointed in February 2025 as the successor to Domenico Tedesco, will step down when his deal expires on July 31, bringing an 18-month stint with the Red Devils to an end. Garcia guided Belgium to the World Cup quarter-finals, where they were beaten 2-1 by eventual champions Spain. It was Belgium's best performance at a major tournament since reaching the semi-finals of the 2018 World Cup, although their displays in the United States, Canada and Mexico were often unconvincing. In a statement released by the Belgian federation, Garcia reflected on his time in charge and the work done during a period of transition.



"After discussions with the RBFA, we have decided not to extend the excellent journey we have shared over the past 18 months. I leave Belgium in League A of the Nations League and among the top eight teams in the world. I would like to thank my outstanding group of players, sports director Vincent Mannaert, and the fans who supported us throughout this World Cup. I wish Belgium every success as they continue the generational transition that I was proud to help initiate." Garcia took charge at a difficult time for Belgian football following Tedesco's departure. He steadied the side by preserving their place in UEFA Nations League A before leading them through World Cup qualification and into the last eight of the tournament. The RBFA credited the former Roma, Marseille and Napoli manager with restoring sta-

bility to the national team. "Rudi Garcia has unquestionably played a key role in restoring the Belgian Red Devils," sports director Vincent Mannaert said. "He was appointed national coach in a challenging sporting and financial context. Thanks in particular to his commitment and experience, team cohesion was restored and a strong result was achieved at the most recent World Cup. "On behalf of the federation,

I would like to warmly thank Rudi and his assistants for the past 18 months. Together with my team, I am currently preparing for a new cycle, including the appointment of a new national coach." Belgium have not named Garcia's successor. The new coach will inherit a squad in the middle of a generational transition as the Red Devils begin preparations for their next competitive cycle. Rudi Garcia will leave his role as Belgium head coach after his contract expires on July 31, following an 18-month tenure that included leading the team to the 2026 World Cup quarter-finals. Appointed in February 2025, Garcia stabilized a transitioning Belgian squad, maintained their UEFA Nations League A status, and secured their best major tournament performance since 2018. The Royal Belgian Football Association praised his commitment and is preparing for a new coaching cycle amid a generational transition, with no successor named yet.

Sikandar Raza Rejects India As Clear Favourites For Zimbabwe T20I Series

Raza Claims Equal Chance For Both Teams



New Delhi: Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza has dismissed suggestions that India will walk into the upcoming T20I series as overwhelming favourites, insisting that the three-match contest will be far more evenly balanced than many expect. The series begins on Thursday at the Harare Sports Club, with the remaining matches scheduled for July 25 and 26 at the same venue. India arrive in Zimbabwe looking to recover from a disappointing white-ball tour of Europe. Under new T20I captain Shreyas Iyer, the visitors suffered a 2-0 series defeat to Ireland in Belfast before enduring a 4-0 loss against England in a five-match series. India also lost the ODI leg 2-1 under Shubman Gill, leaving the side searching for answers ahead of another overseas assignment.

Despite India's pedigree in the shortest format, Raza believes the contest is too close to call. The veteran all-rounder, who has represented Zimbabwe in 136 T20Is, stressed that recent performances by his side justify their confidence. "Both countries will have an equal chance in this series. But one thing I am very sure about is that because Zimbabwe has been playing very consistent and very entertaining cricket, I can say this for sure that this series will be very entertaining," Raza told Star Sports. Zimbabwe's optimism is rooted in a remarkable run of results over the past year. In one of the biggest upsets of the Men's T20 World Cup earlier this year, the African side stunned Australia by 23 runs in Colombo, a result that ultimately contributed to the former cham-

pions' shock group-stage exit. Zimbabwe also registered victories over Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in 2026, underlining their rise in the shortest format. Raza acknowledged that India are undergoing a transition phase but pointed out that Zimbabwe, too, are rebuilding and integrating younger players into the setup. "Yes, India is going through a transition and to some extent you'll see Zimbabwe is also gonna have a little bit of transition happening as well. I don't see it as a one-sided series," he said. India will nevertheless draw confidence from their last tour of Zimbabwe in 2024, when they recovered from an opening defeat to win the five-match T20I series 4-1 under Shubman Gill. With both teams eager to prove a point, Raza expects an entertaining contest rather than a foregone conclusion. Brief counter-attacks from Ishan Kishan (56 off 35), Shreyas Iyer (38 off 16) and Tilak Varma (53 off 25) kept India alive for a while, but the visitors eventually slumped to a 56-run defeat. England looked like a team that had figured India out long before the final T20I. After Prasidh Krishna removed Phil Salt early, Harry Brook and Jos Buttler dismantled India's bowling with a record 233-run partnership, the highest stand for any wicket in England's T20I history.

Saina Not Surprised By Sindhu's Japan Open Win: Never Write Off Champions

New Delhi: Former World No. 1 Saina Nehwal believes PV Sindhu has proved why she should never be written off, saying the two-time Olympic medallist has rediscovered her best form at the perfect time ahead of the Badminton World Championships. Speaking on the sidelines of a promotional event a day after Sindhu's historic Japan Open Super 750 triumph, Saina said the title was evidence that the former world champion remained a force to be reckoned with despite enduring a 19-month title drought and a string of injury setbacks. "The last 2-3 years were actually very tough. She was trying to come out of the injuries but the way she has come out of it... the Super Series win that she won yesterday after defeating three or four top players here. And quite comfortably, she has attacked very hard. Her attack has improved a lot," Saina said, as quoted by PTI. "So, that shows that, obviously, there are opportunities to win. But as you age, with injuries, you have to tack-



le it well. So, it is stressful when you play at that level. So, I am sure she is going through a little bit of stress and pressure. "But I think after winning this, she has got her confidence back. And you can never write a champion off. She is always going to come back and do well. She has played at that level for so many years." The two-time World Championships medallist backed Sindhu to carry the momentum into the World Championships, which India will host from August 17 to 23. We have great players who are, I think, capable of win-

ning it in India in front of our home crowd," Saina said, identifying Sindhu and men's singles ace Lakshya Sen as India's leading medal hopes. For Sindhu, the triumph in Tokyo was as much an emotional release as it was a tactical masterclass. The title ended a grueling 19-month wait, during which recurring stress fractures contributed to her slide to World No. 18. Having struggled for consistency since winning Commonwealth Games gold in 2022, Sindhu arrived at the Japan Open with renewed pur-

pose. Under coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama, she is no longer relying solely on her trademark steep smashes. That evolution was evident in Sunday's hard-fought victory over Akane Yamaguchi. Sindhu controlled the forecourt with sharp, deceptive variations that repeatedly unsettled Yamaguchi, whose defence is regarded as one of the strongest on the circuit. Her resurgence comes at an ideal time for Indian badminton, with the World Championships returning to India for the first time in 17 years.

Paula Badosa Suffers Heartbreak With Forced Retirement In Iasi Open Final

New Delhi: Paula Badosa's remarkable resurgence on the WTA Tour ended in heartbreak on Monday as the Spaniard was forced to retire from the Iasi Open final against Egypt's Mayar Sherif. Badosa called time on the match with Sherif leading 6-4, 4-0, handing the Egyptian her second WTA title and extending her winning streak to 10 matches. The final, which had been delayed by rain, marked the end of Badosa's nine-match winning run. The former world No.2 had arrived in Romania on the back of her title triumph at the WTA 125 event in Bastad and was bidding to win consecutive tournaments for the first time in her career. Sherif, ranked No.73 in the world, dominated the latter stages of the contest after edging a competitive opening



set. The Egyptian had already enjoyed a strong clay-court campaign and made the most of Badosa's physical struggles to seal back-to-back titles. For Badosa, the defeat was especially painful given the difficult months she has endured. The 27-year-old has battled injuries and inconsistent form in recent seasons, slipping outside the top 100 earlier this year before redis-

covering her rhythm in Romania. Meanwhile, her run to the final helped her climb to No.93 in the WTA rankings and strengthened her hopes of securing direct entry into the US Open main draw. An emotional Badosa apologised to the crowd after retiring from the match, admitting that her body had let her down at the worst possible moment. "I'm always a play-

er that's very honest and real. I have to say I hate this moment right now, I hate losing a final and I'm really sorry that I had to do it in this way but I couldn't keep up with my body so I apologise for that also," Badosa said. The Spaniard also reflected on her recent revival after one of the toughest stretches of her career. "But I also want to say, one month ago I was in one of the worst losing streaks of my career and one month after I made one of the best winning streaks of my career lately we have had a little more positivity," she added. Although the Iasi title slipped away, Badosa leaves Romania with renewed confidence after reaching consecutive finals and reminding the tennis world of the quality that once took her to world No.2.

India Spends Over Rs 53 Crore On CWG 2026 Preparations For Glasgow Games

New Delhi: The Sports Ministry has spent more than Rs 53 crore on preparing Indian athletes for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, with athletics and boxing receiving the largest share of the funding ahead of the multi-sport event, which begins on July 23. While the government expects improved performances from the contingent, India's overall medal tally is likely to take a hit because of the Games' reduced schedule. The Glasgow edition has been significantly scaled down, featuring only 10 able-bodied sports and six para disciplines as organisers sought to cut costs. Several of India's traditionally strong events, including badminton, shooting, wrestling, hockey and cricket, are absent from the programme, reducing the country's medal opportunities. Athletics has received the biggest investment, with over Rs 20 crore allocated to the preparation of the 32-member squad. Led by two-time Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra, the Indian team will



compete in 21 events at the Games. The expenditure covered overseas training camps and exposure trips designed to help athletes adapt to international conditions. Indian athletes trained at the High Altitude Training Centre in Colorado Springs in the United States and also spent time in Switzerland, Turkey and South Africa as part of their preparations. The focus on foreign training reflects the

government's broader strategy of ensuring that medal contenders are acclimatised well before the start of the competition. Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya is expected to reach Glasgow later on Monday and will interact with athletes and officials during his stay. India will also formally take over as the host nation for the 2030 Commonwealth Games during the closing ceremony.

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