

Death toll in Meghalaya illegal coal mine blast rises to 27; search continues for missing workers

Shillong, Feb 09: The number of people who lost their lives in the coal mine explosion in Meghalaya’s East Jaintia Hills district has increased to 27 after rescue teams recovered two more bodies from the accident site. Officials said search operations are still continuing as several workers are believed to be missing. The explosion occurred at an illegal coal mine located in the Thangskhu area of Umsngat village on Thursday, triggering a large-scale rescue effort involving multiple agencies. Teams from the police, disaster response forces, and local authorities have been working continuously at the site despite difficult terrain, unstable ground conditions, and safety risks inside the abandoned mining pits. Police officials said the latest bodies were found during an intensive search operation carried out over the past day.

With the recovery of these bodies, the death toll has risen to 27, making the incident one of the deadliest mining accidents reported in the region in recent years. Authorities said the search will continue until every missing worker is traced and accounted for. Superintendent of Police Vikash Kumar stated that officials are also working to establish the identities of the deceased. Many of the workers were reportedly engaged in informal mining operations, and identification has become challenging due to the absence of proper employment records and the condition of the bodies recovered from the site. The district administration is coordinating with local village leaders and family members to verify the identities through available documents and other means. Meanwhile, police have initiated legal proceedings in connection with the inci-



dent. A suo motu FIR has been registered at Khliehriat police station under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, and the Explosive Substances Act. Officials said the case highlights the illegal nature of

the mining operation and the alleged violations of safety and regulatory norms that may have contributed to the tragedy. As part of the investigation, two individuals have been arrested so far for their alleged involvement in running the illegal mining operation. The arrested

persons have been identified as Former Chyrmang, 36, a resident of Jalaphet Pordung village, and Shamehi War, 42, from Sutnga Pohwailong village. Police officials indicated that more arrests are likely as the investigation progresses and additional evidence is gathered.

In Brief

Meghalaya Mine blast

Shillong: The Meghalaya government has decided to constitute a Judicial Inquiry Commission under the Commission of Inquiry Act to investigate the recent mining tragedy in the Mynsnat–Thangsko area of East Jaintia Hills district, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said, as the death toll in the incident rose to 27. Officials said six of those killed were from Assam, highlighting the inter-state dimension of the tragedy and the continued migration of workers to illegal coal mines in the region. Several of the victims were daily-wage labourers who were working in hazardous conditions when the incident occurred. Officials said six of those killed were from Assam, highlighting the inter-state dimension of the tragedy and the continued migration of workers to illegal coal mines in the region.

CM Khemchand assures full security for Kuki-Zos

Imphal: Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh stated that the State Government would take responsibility for the safety of the people belonging to the Kuki-Zo community who visit Imphal, including medical treatment. The above statement was made during the flagging off programme of the project of “Strengthening of existing pavement from km 0.00 to km 15.35 and km 30.00 to km 45.00 of NH-137A (Imphal- Kakching Lamkhai section)” held today at the Langthabal Lep Makha Leikai, Imphal West.

Arms, ammunition recovered

Imphal: Security forces recovered arms and ammunition during a search operation conducted in the general area of Lenglong and Taikhang under Nungba-PS, Noney district. The recovered arms include one 7.62 mm AK-47 rifle with magazine, one US Carbine M2 with magazine, one .22 Pistol with magazine, one DJI drone, four 8mm blank rounds, 17 5.56 mm rounds, 39 7.62 mm AK-47 rounds, eight 9 mm carbine ball rounds, nine 7.62 mm SLR ball, seven 12 bore cartridges, two Baofeng radio sets and Cortex wire.

Dr Palin Khundongbam honoured as Torch Bearer of Quality Healthcare in NE India

Imphal, Feb 09: Shija Hospitals & Research Institute Pvt. Ltd. congratulated Dr. Palin Khundongbam, Chairman and Managing Director, and the entire Shija team on being honoured the Torch Bearer of Quality Healthcare in North East India at the inaugural North East Quality Conclave 2026. The recognition was presented on February 7 at the NEDFi Convention Centre, Guwahati. The conclave was organised by GNRC Hospitals in partnership with the Consortium of Accredited Healthcare Organizations (CAHO) and the Association of Healthcare Providers of India, (AHPI) North East Chapter. The conclave also honoured distinguished contributors to healthcare in the region, including Dr. Narendra Nath Dutta of Downtown Hospital, Guwahati; Dr. Harsha Bhattacharjee of Sri Sankaradeva Nethralaya, Guwahati; and Prof. (Dr.) Subhash Khanna of Swagat Hospitals Pvt. Ltd. Shija Hospitals has maintained a consistent focus on quality and patient safety. It may be noted that Shija was the first hospital in the state to receive ISO certification in 2006. The hospital was awarded the Pre-Entry NABH certificate in December 2016 and achieved full NABH accreditation on July 13, 2023. The Shija Blood Center is NABH accredited, and the laboratory has been accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) since 2015. In his address, Dr. Palin emphasized that prioritizing quality has led to a measurable reduction in avoidable medical errors, public grievances, and litigation. He underscored that patient safety must be embedded as an organizational culture rather than treated as a checklist. Highlighting the future of healthcare, he called for expanding the definition of care to include environmental responsibility, noting that sustainable healthcare represents the next phase in the quality journey. Dr. Palin also serves as the North East Regional Lead for the Health and Environment Leadership Platform (HELP), representing the region on its steering committee and advocating environmentally sustainable healthcare practices.

Meghalaya govt orders judicial probe into East Jaintia Hills mining tragedy

Meghalaya Mine blast

Shillong, Feb 09: The Meghalaya government has decided to constitute a Judicial Inquiry Commission under the Commission of Inquiry Act to investigate the recent mining tragedy in the Mynsnat–Thangsko area of East Jaintia Hills district, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said, as the death toll in the incident rose to 27. Officials said six of those killed were from Assam, highlighting the inter-state dimension of the tragedy and the continued migration of workers to illegal coal mines in the region. Several of the victims were daily-wage labourers who were working in hazardous conditions when the incident occurred. Officials said six of those killed were from

Assam, highlighting the inter-state dimension of the tragedy and the continued migration of workers to illegal coal mines in the region. Several of the victims were daily-wage labourers who were working in hazardous conditions when the incident occurred. The blast and subsequent cave-in at the illegal mining site triggered a massive rescue and recovery operation involving the police, disaster response teams and local authorities. Bodies were recovered over several days amid difficult terrain and safety concerns, while the possibility of more victims being trapped could not be ruled out earlier. The incident has once again exposed the persistence of illegal rat-hole coal min-



ing in Meghalaya, despite a long-standing ban and repeated warnings about the dangers associated with such operations. Announcing the judicial inquiry, the Chief Minister said the commission will examine the sequence of events leading to the tragedy, identify lapses and fix responsibility. The findings are expected to

form the basis for legal action and policy measures aimed at preventing similar incidents in the future. The government said it remains committed to ensuring justice for the victims’ families and to taking stringent action against those found responsible, as public outrage continues to grow over the scale of the tragedy.

Assam CM Himanta Demands “Transparent Explanation” From Gaurav Gogoi Over Rawalpindi Visit

Guwahati, Feb 09: The political spat between Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi escalated on Monday, with Sarma demanding a “transparent explanation” regarding Gogoi’s 2013 visit to the Rawalpindi district of Pakistan. The Chief Minister alleged that Gogoi’s visa was restricted to Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, raising questions about how he accessed a “high-security” district. Taking to X (formerly Twitter), Sarma asserted that under Pakistan’s immigration rules, travel beyond designated cities requires specific authorization. He highlighted that Takshashila (Taxila), which Gogoi admitted to visiting, is located in the Rawalpindi District rather than

the Islamabad Capital Territory. Sarma further suggested that because Rawalpindi houses the Pakistan Army’s General Headquarters, the visit might have been facilitated through “institutional arrangements” rather than standard civilian permissions.

Responding to the charges during a press conference, Gaurav Gogoi dismissed the Chief Minister’s claims as “mindless and bogus,” stating that Sarma was “floundering and sinking in his own web of lies.” Gogoi clarified that he accompanied his wife on a 10-day trip to Pakistan in December 2013 for her work-related purposes. He noted that Takshashila is a routine “day’s trip from Islamabad” and a significant archaeological site in Indian civilization.

Gogoi further pointed out that his original general passport, which contains all travel details and stamps from the visit, was submitted to the Government of India in 2014 when he applied for a diplomatic passport. “It lies with them and it contains all the details of my Pakistan visit,” the Congress MP asserted, suggesting the government already has the facts. The controversy follows Sarma’s allegations on Sunday, where he claimed Gogoi and his family had “Pakistani links” and suggested a “deeper connection” involving a Pakistani national and the secret passing of intelligence. Gogoi has vehemently denied these claims, labeling the Chief Minister’s press briefings as “worse than C-grade cinema.” As the verbal duel



continues, the Chief Minister maintains that the lack of a specific visa endorsement for a restricted district like Rawalpindi remains a “legitimate and factual” question that warrants a clear response.

CM Khemchand assures full security for Kuki-Zos travelling to Imphal

Imphal, Feb 09: Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh stated that the State Government would take responsibility for the safety of the people belonging to the Kuki-Zo community who visit Imphal, including medical treatment. The above statement was made during the flagging off programme of the project of “Strengthening of existing pavement from km 0.00 to km 15.35 and km 30.00 to km 45.00 of NH-137A (Imphal- Kakching Lamkhai section)” held today at the Langthabal Lep Makha Leikai, Imphal West. The project had been sanctioned by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH), Government of India. Speaking of the airlifting of MLA, Thanlon AC Vungzagin Valte from Bir Tikendrajit International Airport to New Delhi for medical treatment on Sunday afternoon, the Chief Minister extended his best wishes for speedy recovery of the MLA. Regarding the project being flagged off today, Yumnam Khemchand expressed hopefulness of timely completion and sincerity of the contractors. He further instructed the contractors to maintain quality of work and complete them on time. Replying to a query regarding the deadline for completion of the road project from the Chief Minister, the concerned contractors assured the crowd to complete the same before April-end. Meanwhile, in his speech before the gathering, Minister Khuraijam Loken Singh praised the Chief Minister for his initiative to commence the highway strengthening work, which, he said, had been left unattended for a very long time. The Minister further urged the people of the State to avoid causing any hindrance to the developmental works being taken up.

Arms, ammunition recovered in Noney, Tengenoupal



Imphal, Feb 09: Security forces recovered arms and ammunition during a search operation conducted in the general area of Lenglong and Taikhang under Nungba-PS, Noney district. The recovered arms include one 7.62 mm AK-47 rifle with magazine, one US Carbine M2 with magazine, one .22 Pistol with magazine, one DJI drone, four 8mm blank rounds, 17 5.56 mm rounds, 39 7.62 mm AK-47 rounds, eight 9

mm carbine ball rounds, nine 7.62 mm SLR ball, seven 12 bore cartridges, two Baofeng radio sets and Cortex wire. Security forces also recovered one AK-rifle, one pistol, two Improvised Mortars, one Single Barrel Rifle, two Live improvised Mortar Bombs, 10 7.62 mm rounds and IEDs and IED wire bundles in another search operation launched at Molnom-Molnoi Village and adjoining areas under Tengenoupal-PS, Tengenoupal district.

Scientist from Bajali Secures Key Position in American Physical Society

Patacharkuchi, Feb 09: Jugal Talukdar, a native of Bajali district in Lower Assam, has brought pride to Assam and the country by securing a prestigious position in the American Physical Society (APS), one of the world’s most influential organisations in physics research.

A resident of Medhikuchi village under Bajali district, Talukdar is the elder son of retired UDA Janak Talukdar and retired headmistress Maini Amatya (née Kashalya) Talukdar. Owing to his outstanding academic achievements and dedication to science, he has been appointed Chairman of the FGS (Forum on Graduate Student Affairs) of the American Physical Society, becoming the first Assamese to hold this esteemed post.

Talukdar completed his HSLC examination from Sankardev Shishu Niketan, Chokuti, and secured sixth position statewide in the Higher Secondary (Science stream) examination in 2012 from Bajali College. He then joined the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune, where he earned a Bachelor’s degree in Physics in 2017. He later pursued a PhD at the University of Oklahoma, supported by a fellowship from the Homer L. Dodge Department of Physics and Astronomy.

Subsequently, he joined the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as a postdoctoral research scientist in Quantum Information Science, working under Nobel laureate Professor H. David Politzer. Currently, he is employed as a junior



scientist at a highly reputed institution in the United States.

In addition to his APS appointment, Talukdar has also been selected by the American Physical Society to participate in a high-level discussion at Capitol Hill in the United States Parliament complex, marking another significant milestone in his distinguished career.

His remarkable achievements have brought recognition to Assam, particularly Bajali district. Several organisations and institutions from Bajali, along with Cabinet Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass, have extended their congratulations and best wishes to Jugal Talukdar for his exceptional success.

Assam CM Sarma escalates ‘Pak links’ claim against Gaurav Gogoi and wife



Guwahati, Feb 09: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday intensified his attack on Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi after a special investigation team (SIT) submitted its report into alleged links between Gogoi's wife and Pakistan. Addressing a press conference, Sarma described the allegations as serious and said the state cabinet had decided to request the Union Home Ministry (MHA) to hand over the probe to a central agency, citing national security concerns and the wider implications of the case. He said the process would begin once the MHA grants consent. The case relates to allegations that Gogoi's Brit-

ish wife, Elizabeth Coleburn, had links with Pakistan, including its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), while working in Islamabad under Tauqeer Sheikh, a former adviser to Pakistan's Planning Commission. The Assam government had constituted an SIT to examine the matter and registered a case based on its preliminary findings. Referring to the 44-page SIT report, Sarma alleged that Coleburn shared confidential documents with Sheikh and that salary transactions from a Pakistani firm, Lead Pakistan, indicated she was being "managed" from there. He further claimed that someone from the Gogoi family

provided inputs and suggestions to the firm from time to time. Sarma also raised questions over a 2013 visit by Gogoi and his wife to Pakistan, alleging that though permission was initially granted only for Lahore, they later travelled to Islamabad and Karachi. He sought an explanation from Gogoi on the matter. Additionally, the chief minister alleged that Gogoi surrendered his minor son's passport at the Delhi passport office in 2022 to facilitate British citizenship. He claimed that while the child's Indian passport mentioned religion as Hindu, the religion column was left blank in the British passport. Sarma gave Gogoi 10 days to clarify his position. Justifying the move for a central probe, Sarma said the Assam government had limitations in conducting such an investigation and maintained that a deeper connection needed to be examined. 'Super flop': Gogoi mocks CM's presser Gogoi, however, dismissed the press conference as a "super flop" and "worse than C-grade cinema." In an online post, the Congress deputy leader in Lok Sabha said journalists from Delhi and Assam had to endure a "mindless and bogus" presentation. Speaking to reporters, Gogoi accused Sarma of embarrassing himself on the national stage and failing to convince journalists during the interaction. "After the 2.5-hour press conference, he was unable to convince journalists. The question-answer was not satisfactory for the journalists. Sarma thinks that people of Assam don't have intelligent brain, knowledge. He is a liar chief minister. He has made a mockery of the chief minister's chair. The SIT report shows that he is worried," Gogoi added.

‘A call to genocide,’ Congress slams BJP over ‘point-blank shot’ video



Guwahati, Feb 09: The Congress party on Sunday slammed the BJP for allegedly promoting communal hatred after a video surfaced on the Assam unit's official X account, showing Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma purportedly aiming a rifle at two individuals identified as minorities. The party has demanded urgent legal action

in response. The now-removed video, captioned "point-blank shot," appeared to depict Sarma firing at two people, one wearing a skull cap and the other sporting a beard. Congress described the clip as a direct instigation of violence, warning that it cannot be dismissed as mere online trolling. Congress general secretary K C Venugopal

described the video as a serious escalation of hate speech, claiming that the official BJP account appeared to show deliberate targeting of minorities and warning that it represented a dangerous call to genocide.

Venugopal urged swift judicial intervention, warning that the video was more than just online trolling. He described it as a dangerous message coming from the top and stressed that the judiciary must take strict action without showing any leniency. Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete criticized the deletion of the clip, saying it did not remove the BJP's responsibility. "This video reflects the BJP's true face, spreading hatred and violence. Mr Modi, are courts and institutions watching?" she tweeted.

Shama Mohammed, another party spokesperson, accused the BJP of flouting constitutional values. "Prime Minister Modi speaks of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas,' yet his trusted minister Himanta Biswa Sarma released a video targeting Muslims via BJP Assam's official account. This is an attack on India's Constitution. The Supreme Court's silence raises serious concerns," she said. Other opposition leaders also condemned the BJP and criticized the Election Commission. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi described the video as "one of the most hate-driven posts ever," noting that although it was deleted, it had already been widely shared. She further accused the Election Commission of failing to act, calling it "toothless and ineffective in the face of BJP's political targeting."

ILS Hospitals Saves Infant in Rare Paediatric Neuro-Critical

Dimapur, Feb 09: ILS Hospitals Agartala successfully treats a rare paediatric neuro-critical emergency, showcasing Tripura's growing capacity for advanced neurological care, multidisciplinary expertise and life-saving critical interventions within the state's healthcare system.

ILS Hospitals, Agartala has successfully managed a rare and life-threatening paediatric neurological emergency, demonstrating the state's growing capacity to provide advanced neuro-critical care without the need for out-of-state referrals. At a decisive stage of management, critical procedural support was provided by Dr Sadu Mog, who ensured timely central venous access, enabling the safe administration of medications and intensive monitoring. This intervention reflected the hospital's coordinated and well-integrated clinical response system. Throughout the 14-day treatment period, the Infant Paediatric Critical Care Unit (IPCU) and ward nursing teams, supported by resident medical officers, maintained continuous neurological and physiological monitoring. Strict adherence to critical care protocols, timely interventions and vigilant observation were key factors contributing to the successful outcome. The case involved a six-month-old infant who was admitted in a critical condition with high-grade fever, recurrent seizures, a bulging fontanelle, abnormal involuntary movements and focal neurological deficits. These alarming clinical signs strongly suggested severe meningoencephalitis accompanied by raised intracranial pressure, a medical emergency associated with high mortality and long-term neurological complications if not treated promptly. From the moment of admission, the infant was placed under intensive neuro-critical monitoring. The case was led by Dr Akash DS, Consultant Paediatrician, who immediately initiated rapid, evidence-based intervention. Treatment included broad-spectrum antimicrobial therapy, corticosteroids to control inflammation, aggressive intracranial pressure management and advanced seizure control measures, all aligned with international paediatric critical care protocols. Despite early and aggressive intervention, the child's condition deteriorated further, progressing to status epilepticus with worsening neurological function. This required escalation of care and continuous



multidisciplinary evaluation, highlighting the complexity and severity of the case.

Advanced neuroimaging played a crucial role in diagnosis and treatment planning. A CT scan revealed caudate hypodensity, while subsequent MRI imaging confirmed the presence of multifocal cerebral infarcts. These findings were consistent with infection-related cerebral vasculopathy, a rare but serious complication known to significantly increase the risk of long-term neurological sequelae in infants. The radiological assessment was provided by Dr Nani Gopal Tripura, Consultant Radiologist, whose precise interpretation of imaging findings helped guide critical clinical decisions and refine the treatment strategy.

Threatening to reveal the tribal district council chaired by Tipra Motha, Tripura chief minister

Dimapur, Feb 09: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday threatened to expose "every unethical work" allegedly taking place at the headquarters of the Tipra Motha Party-ruled tribal areas autonomous district council, claiming that the state government was aware of the happenings there.

Addressing a joining programme at Khumulwng in West Tripura, Saha alleged that the council was unable to pay pension to retired employees due to financial indiscipline. Khumulwng is the headquarters of the TMP, which is an ally of the ruling BJP in the northeastern state. "They are unable to pay pension to its retired employees because of financial indiscipline at the tribal council. The Centre or the state doesn't give extra money to pay pension to the retired employees apart from outlay under committed expenditure", he said. Accusing the TMP for delaying the election of village committees (VCs), the CM said the present council has created as many as 123 village committees without follow-



ing the law and later rolled back the move. "Because of creation of new VCs, the entire process of conducting the election has got de-

layed", he alleged. Elections to the 587 VCs were scheduled to be held in February 2021. Saha said, "We will reveal every unethical work

taking place at Khumulwng and tell the people every lie at the appropriate time."

Claiming credit for the resettlement of over 8,000 Bru families, the CM said the BJP-led government had solved the 23-year-old problem. "We have solved the 23-year Reang refugee problem by signing an agreement and will not allow anyone to take credit", he said in an indirect reference to TMP's claim of solving the issue.

Criticising TMP for claiming credit for an agreement with two outlawed groups, the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), Saha said his government would not allow anyone to claim that it had brought lasting peace.

"The Centre has sanctioned Rs 250 crore for the rehabilitation of the surrendered militants as part of a peace accord. We will not allow anybody to indulge in politics out of the peace deal", he said.

Earlier, the CM welcomed 413 supporters of different political parties to the BJP.

IDPs of Manipur renew hope while hailing

Imphal, Feb 09: Internally displaced persons (IPDs) languishing at various relief camps across the valley districts of Manipur said that their hope and expectation were renewed while hailing a recent remark of chief minister Y Khemchand on the issue of the IDPs. A day after he assumed office as the new chief minister of Manipur, Yumnam Khemchand had said that the top priority of his government was to look into the problems of the people displaced by the violent crisis in both hill and valley districts. Hailing the remark of the new chief minister, bodies of the IDPs languishing in relief camps across the valley district, in a joint statement, on Saturday said that they look upon the government under Khemchand's leadership with renewed hope and expectations. While extending congratulations to the new chief minister, the IDPs urged the new government to take immediate and concrete steps to address the prolonged humanitarian crisis arising from the ethnic violence that erupted on May 3, 2023. At this critical phase in Manipur's history, the people of the state, particularly the internally displaced persons who have endured immense suffering for nearly three years, are looking to the new leadership with renewed hope and expectations of stability, justice and inclusive governance, it stated. The statement noted that many displaced families continue to live in relief camps and temporary shelters, awaiting safe return to their native villages and restoration of normal life. The joint statement expressed confidence that the experience and understanding of ground realities possessed by chief minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh would help steer the state towards peace, rehabilitation and social harmony. The immediate priority should be the restoration of peace and rule of law across Manipur, the IDPs stressed in



the statement while adding that it would be followed by the safe return, rehabilitation and reconstruction of homes for displaced families. The bodies of the IDPs also called for justice and accountability for victims of violence and protection of the constitutional rights of all communities, stating that lasting peace cannot be achieved without trust, fairness and equal treatment. Strengthening unity and social harmony among communities was also essential for rebuilding Manipur after months of unrest, they added. The joint statement was issued by the Churachandpur Meitei Union Committee, the Meitei Council Moreh, the Committee on Protection of Meitei Victims Moreh, the Meitei Union Kangpokpi District, the Apex Committee of Victims Villages including Ekou, Sadu Yengkhuman, Dolaithabi, Leitanpokpi, Mairapat and Gwalatabi, and the Torbung Gram Panchayat Victim Committee. They also assured full cooperation with the new government while asserting that they would support all sincere efforts aimed at restoring normalcy and dignity to the lives of affected people.

Arunachal Gov stresses need to strengthen border roads

Itanagar, Feb 09: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) on Saturday stressed the need to strengthen border road infrastructure in the state, stating that strategic roads are vital lifelines for national security and the well-being of frontier communities. He said that roads must be built to the highest standards and completed on time. During a meeting with Director General of Border Roads (DGBR) Lt Gen Harpal Singh at Lok Bhavan here, the governor said that any delay or sub-standard execution directly affects connectivity, emer-

gency response and the daily lives of people in remote and difficult terrain. The two held detailed discussions on the progress of border road projects and their role in accelerating socio-economic development and improving the quality of life in remote and border areas, an official statement said. The DGBR apprised the governor of future plans related to the Frontier Highway and other sensitive road alignments, which are being taken up on priority. The governor appreciated the high-quality roads constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO),

noting that improved connectivity has transformed border villages by enabling better access to education, healthcare, markets and livelihood opportunities. He said enhanced mobility has boosted economic activity, strengthened social integration and reinforced national presence in far-flung areas of the northeastern state. Parnaik added that the improved road network is providing strong momentum to the Centre's vibrant village programme by turning border settlements into centres of growth, resilience and opportunity.

Financial Literacy Week to be observed from February 9

Imphal, Feb 09: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is observing Financial Literacy Week (FLW) 2026 from February 9 to 13 across the country, including the state of Manipur. Financial Literacy Week has been observed annually by the Reserve Bank since 2016 with the objective of spreading awareness on key financial topics through focused and structured campaigns. The theme for FLW 2026 is “KYC – Your First Step to Safe Banking”, which underscores the importance of Know Your Customer (KYC) as the foundation of a safe, secure, and trustworthy banking system. The campaign seeks to convey that

KYC is not merely a regulatory requirement but a simple process with multiple safe and convenient modes of compliance. The campaign also focuses on familiarising the public with Central KYC (CKYC), alerting them against fraudulent calls, messages and links relating to KYC updation, and sensitising people about the risks and consequences of becoming money mules. The Financial Literacy Week 2026 was inaugurated at the All-India level by Sanjay Malhotra, Governor, RBI, on February 9. This was followed by a programme by RBI, Imphal at Imperial Hall, Classic Grande, Imphal.

The programme commenced with welcome and felicitation of guests by Chamailo M. Samuel, Deputy General Manager, Reserve Bank of India. The inaugural programme was addressed by N. Sridhar, Chief General Manager, Reserve Bank of India, who delivered the keynote address. The function also featured addresses by A. Subhash Singh, Director, Institutional Finance, Government of Manipur, and Partha Mandal, General Manager (Officer-in-Charge), NABARD Regional Office. The event included the launch of Financial Literacy Week posters, a panel discussion on “KYC, CKYC, Account Hygiene and Discipline”, and a presentation

highlighting the objectives and key messages of the FLW 2026 theme. As part of Financial Literacy Week 2026, RBI Imphal will organise a series of outreach and awareness activities across the state. A Cyclothon – a mass cycle rally will be held in Imphal on February 10, aimed at spreading awareness on safe banking practices, account hygiene, and financial discipline. On the same day, a Shumang Leela, a traditional form of Nukkad Natak, will be performed by a professional drama team in Moirang Block, Bishnupur District, to communicate the messages of the FLW theme in a simple, engaging and culturally resonant manner.

East Jaintia Hills SP Vikash Kumar says illegal coal mine blast Sub Judice

Shillong, Feb 09:The East Jaintia Hills Police on Sunday said that the search and rescue operation following the illegal coal mining blast that occurred on February 5 is still underway, even as the matter is currently under the consideration of the Hon'ble High Court.

Speaking to reporters, Superintendent of Police Vikash Kumar informed that the High Court has taken cognizance of the incident and summoned the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police of East Jaintia Hills for personal appearance.

“In connection with the illegal coal mining blast that happened on the 5th of February, the Hon'ble High Court had taken cognizance and the DC and SP of East Jaintia Hills were called for personal appearance. Since the matter is sub judice, at this stage, we cannot say much,” SP Kumar said.

He added that the police are carrying out all necessary actions within the legal framework and assured that the investigation is progressing steadily.

“The investigation in the case is ongoing. We have made arrests and it is



going in the right direction. I'm sure that we'll bring it to the logical conclusion,” he stated.

On the status of court proceedings, the SP said clarity on the next date of appearance would be available only after official orders are issued. “We'll be getting the order by evening, so after that only we'll be able to say on which date appearance will be there,” he said.

Addressing concerns over the continuation of rescue efforts, SP Kumar

clarified that operations have not been halted.

“The search and rescue operation is still ongoing. Yesterday also it was carried out, though no body could be recovered, and today as well the operation continues,” he said.

He further noted that the duration of the operation would depend on inputs from agencies involved, including the NDRF, SDRF and special rescue teams, keeping in mind the difficult terrain and ground conditions.

Tension runs high in Ukhrul after armed militants torch houses

Imphal, Feb 09: Tension ran high in Litan Sareikhong and its neighbouring areas of Ukhrul district after armed militants allegedly set fire to several houses on Monday (February 9), officials said. According to officials, Litan Sareikhong and the nearby village of Sikibung have remained tense since Sunday evening after two tribal groups were involved in intense stone-pelting incidents, prompting the administration to impose prohibitory orders to prevent further escalation. At around midnight on Monday, several houses belonging to members of the Tangkhul Naga community were burnt down at Litan Sareikhong, allegedly by Kuki militants.

A few houses belonging to the Kuki community were also reportedly set ablaze in nearby areas. According to sources, a rural bank and at least nine houses belonging to the Naga community were set on fire, while three houses of the Kuki community were also burnt down. Video footage of the arson has since surfaced on social media, showing armed men setting fire to houses and vehicles. The videos also reportedly show militants wearing camouflage uniforms and carrying sophisticated weapons, firing multiple rounds into the air in the Litan area.

Justice (Retd) BP Katakey slams Meghalaya govt administration for faling to check illegal coal mining in EJH

Shillong, Feb 09: What began as a visit to inspect a deadly accident site turned into a chilling exposé of rampant illegal coal mining across East Jaintia Hills, as BP Katakey, Head of the High Court-appointed Committee, narrated his first-hand account of the tragedy and what he described as a complete administrative blind spot. Katakey said he left for Thangskovillage early on the morning of February 6, immediately after reports of the illegal coal mine accident surfaced. “I reached around 11.45 in the morning and proceeded to the accident site by about 1 pm,” he said. What awaited him, however, was far more disturbing than the incident itself.

“Not only at the accident site, but on both sides of the road leading to it, illegal coal mining activities were going on everywhere,” Katakey stated. Passing through villages such as Mopala and nearby habitations, he said the signs of mining were impossible to miss. “Everywhere — mining activities are going on.”

Accompanied by the Superintendent of Police and the Deputy Commissioner, Katakey stepped out of his vehicle and walked up to several illegal coal pits. On the way, he

interacted with labourers working in the area. “What they disclosed is very serious,” he said. According to the workers, coal mining has been their only livelihood for the past 15 to 20 years.

Expressing shock, Katakey pointed out the proximity of the illegal operations. “This place is hardly 10 kilometres from here. Everybody can see it — except the administrators,” he remarked, calling it a “very disturbing factor.” He immediately directed the district administration and police to seize materials and take action.

On the human toll, Katakey said NDRF, SDRF and district officials informed him that 22 to 23 bodies had been recovered during his visit, later rising to 27. However, local residents and families of missing workers fear the number could be higher. “They said more people had gone inside the pit,” he added.

Katakey also sounded the alarm on a dangerous shift in mining practices. “Earlier, they used to send people inside to dig coal manually. Now they have started using dynamite so they can mine more coal in a shorter period,” he said, calling the trend “extremely dangerous.”

Following his instructions, police



recovered a large number of detonators from areas under Umleng Police Station, including Cement Bazar and Rangad village — believed to be intended for mining blasts.

Issuing a stern warning, Katakey said, “Even if you take it as 27 bodies, you cannot say you are protecting the lives of these innocent labourers.” He stressed that responsibility must be fixed and mine owners brought to book.

“Going by the extent of illegal coal mining I have seen, and the new methods adopted, I am afraid such incidents may occur again,” Katakey cautioned, underscoring the urgent need for sustained and uncompromising action.

Financial Literacy Week 2026 launched by RBI Guwahati Regional Office

•The Reserve Bank of India is conducting Financial Literacy Week (FLW) 2026 from February 9-13, focusing on “KYC – Your First Step to Safe Banking” to raise awareness about Know Your Customer (KYC) compliance essential for secure banking.

Guwahati, Feb 09: The Reserve Bank of India is observing Financial Literacy Week (FLW) 2026 from February 9-13, 2026, as part of its annual initiative to promote awareness on key financial matters among the public through focused campaigns. The week was inaugurated by RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra in Mumbai today, under the theme “KYC – Your First Step to Safe Banking,” which highlights the importance of Know Your Customer (KYC) compliance as the foundation for safe, secure and responsible banking practices. In line with the national observance, the RBI Guwahati Regional Office has commenced a series of awareness programmes and outreach activities across Assam in collaboration with banks and other stakeholders to educate citizens on various aspects of KYC and to strengthen financial awareness at the grassroots level. These initiatives build upon the recent countrywide Gram Panchayat-level campaigns undertaken for the saturation of Financial Inclusion (FI) schemes, wherein re-KYC of bank accounts was carried out to facilitate uninterrupted account operations. RBI Guwahati actively participated in these initia-



tives within its jurisdiction to enable eligible account holders to complete their KYC re-enrolment. During FLW 2026, the focus will be on reinforcing the message that while KYC is an essential regulatory requirement, it is also a simple process supported by multiple safe and convenient modes of compliance. The outreach programmes will familiarise the public with facilities such as Central KYC (CKYC), encourage timely updating of KYC details to avoid disruption in banking services, and promote awareness of secure banking practices. The campaign will also emphasise the need for heightened vigilance against fraudulent calls, messages and links related to KYC updation that may lead to financial loss. In addition, efforts will be made to sensitise the public about the risks and serious legal and financial consequences of becoming money mules due to inducements or misinformation.

Massive Crackdown on Illegal Coal Mining in East Jaintia Hills After Deadly Mine Blast

Shillong, Feb 09: Three days after what is being described as the worst mining tragedy in Meghalaya's history, the East Jaintia Hills district administration has intensified its crackdown on illegal coal mining. The move comes in response to a strict directive issued by the Meghalaya High Court.Five enforcement teams — comprising Executive Magistrates, police personnel, and officials from the Directorate of Mineral Resources (DMR) — have been deployed across the district. These teams seized around 3,197 metric tonnes (MT) of illegally mined coal from nine locations under Umlawang and 351 MT from four locations under Umthe. In a separate operation earlier on Friday, authorities confiscated about 3,356 MT of coal from eight locations along the Sakhain-Thangsko road. Tools and equipment linked to illegal mining were also seized.

Further recoveries included 63 detonators from Umleng Bazar, leading to the arrest of three individuals. At Rangad, officials seized one carton contain-

Katakey Panel Flags Over 37,000 MT of Coal Missing After Ground Verification

Shillong, Feb 09: The 35th interim report of Justice (Retd.) B.P. Katakey has once again highlighted the disappearance of 37,449.53 metric tonnes (MT) of coal in Meghalaya, following a ground verification drive conducted after an aerial survey of coal dumps in four districts.

According to the report, an aerial survey carried out by M/s Garuda UAV Soft Solutions Pvt. Ltd. had detected 1,92,840.13 MT of coal stored in 1,898 dumps across the state. However, when district administrations later conducted physical verification, only 1,55,390.6 MT of coal was located in 1,889 dumps, leaving 37,449.53 MT unaccounted for.

District-wise Findings
East Jaintia Hills:
The aerial survey had identified 1,80,299.48 MT of coal in 1,572 dumps. District officials reported visiting all the locations and found 1,43,939 MT, resulting in a shortfall of 36,360.48 MT.

West Khasi Hills:
Out of 11,707.99 MT detected in 280 dumps, authorities found 11,446 MT after visiting all the sites. The discrepancy stood at 261.99 MT.

South West Khasi Hills:
The survey recorded 797.65 MT in 37 dumps, but officials visited only

28 dumps, recovering just 5.6 MT. A shortage of 792.05 MT was noted. The report stated that no details were provided about efforts to verify the remaining locations identified during the aerial survey.

South Garo Hills:
A total of 35.01 MT of coal was recorded in nine dumps. Officials visited all sites but reported that no coal was found. The entire quantity was marked as missing, with authorities claiming that the coal may have been washed away due to heavy rainfall.

The Commission noted that FIRs were said to have been filed at respective police stations regarding the missing coal at the identified coordinates.

The Committee recommended that the 1,55,390.6 MT of coal recovered during the verification process be transported immediately to designated district depots to prevent further loss. It further advised that the coal be auctioned after obtaining permission from the competent court.

The panel also stressed that FIRs must be promptly registered—where not already done—regarding the missing 37,449.53 MT of coal. Investigations should be completed swiftly to ensure that those involved in illegal mining activities are brought to justice.

Assam journalists begin five-day media tour to Kochi

Kochi, Feb 09: The Press Information Bureau (PIB), Guwahati, has organised a five-day media tour to Kochi, Kerala, for a group of 11 journalists from various media organisations in Assam. The tour, which commenced today, aims to provide media professionals with an in-depth, first-hand understanding of Kochi's vibrant shipping industry, rich cultural heritage, scenic landscapes and significant developmental initiatives. The media delegation includes journalists from prominent organisations in Assam. The team is led by Barnali Mahanta, Media and Communication Officer, PIB Guwahati. A major highlight of the tour is a visit to Cochin Shipyard Limited, one of India's leading shipbuilding and ship maintenance facilities, where the journalists will gain insights into advanced shipbuilding technologies, indigenisation efforts and the shipyard's role in strength-

ening India's maritime capabilities. The delegation will also visit the Cochin Port Authority and the Kochi Water Metro system to understand maritime infrastructure and logistics development in the state. The team will further visit the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) and the Rubber Board to learn about advancements in agriculture and allied sectors. This media tour is part of PIB Guwahati's ongoing efforts to promote regional awareness and national integration by enabling journalists to witness, document and disseminate development stories from different parts of the country. The Kerala tour follows the successful media visit to UT of Ladakh organised last year and reinforces PIB's commitment to fostering informed and responsible journalism through direct exposure, institutional interaction and field-level engagement.

KZC warns Kuki-Zos against travelling in Meitei areas

Imphal, Feb 09: The Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) has cautioned all State and Central Government employees, as well as private employees belonging to the Kuki-Zo community, against travelling or accepting postings in Meitei-dominated areas at this time. According to a press release of KZC, the conflict between the Kuki-Zo people and the Meiteis has not yet ended. There is no political solution, no mutually agreed settlement, and no formal agreement in place to address the root causes of the conflict or to guarantee the safety and security of the Kuki-Zo people. The situation on the ground remains fragile, tense, and unpredictable. With the installation of a new Meitei-led government, there is a strong likelihood that employees may be directed or transferred to serve in Meitei-dominated areas, it said. KZC strongly advised all employees—whether under the State Government, Central Government, public sector undertakings, or private institutions—not to travel, report for duty, or accept postings in such areas, even if officially called upon or instructed to do so. This advisory is issued purely in the interest of safeguarding human life. Life is precious, and no official duty, posting, or administrative order is worth risking one's safety at this critical juncture. In the absence of a credible political solution or a mutually accepted agreement, safe movement and coexistence cannot be guaranteed, it said. KZC urged the authorities to recognise the prevailing realities and to act responsibly so that no lives are put at risk. Until peace is restored through justice and a lasting political settlement, all concerned must exercise utmost caution, it said.

North East Guardian

FEBRUARY 10 2026 VOL 01 NO. 338



The Invisible Backbone: Honoring Migrant Workers

They harvest our food, build our cities, and care for our families, yet migrant workers remain largely invisible in public discourse. These millions of individuals leave behind their homes and loved ones, driven by economic necessity and the hope of a better future. Their contributions are immeasurable—from construction sites to agricultural fields, from hospitals to households—yet they often face exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and social marginalization. The pandemic starkly revealed this paradox: while deemed “essential workers,” many lacked basic protections, healthcare access, and job security. This contradiction demands urgent attention. Comprehensive labor reforms must ensure fair wages, safe workplaces, and pathways to legal status. Beyond policy, we need a cultural shift—recognizing migrant workers not as outsiders but as integral members of our communities. Their resilience deserves dignity, not disdain. As we enjoy the fruits of their labor, let us remember: prosperity built on exploitation is fundamentally unjust. The time has come to move from rhetoric to action, ensuring that those who build our world are valued, protected, and welcomed. (DB)

The overlooked Muslim dispute over Pakistan: Madani vs. Maududi

In the wake of Bangladesh’s mass uprising of 2024, the partition of India in 1947 has re-emerged as a subject of renewed political and historical interest. A range of narratives has surfaced that seeks to frame the 2024 uprising not in continuity with the popular movements of 1971 or 1990, but instead by drawing parallels with the political moment of 1947. Some of these voices go further, presenting the events of 1947 and 2024 as part of a shared historical trajectory and claiming joint authorship of both moments. Against this backdrop, the noted researcher Altaf Parvez turns to the past to interrogate how Islamist parties positioned themselves during the creation of Pakistan in 1947.

Today’s third article in this series focuses on the ideological debate between Maulana Maududi and Maulana Hussain Ahmad Madani during the period of the Partition of India. Maulana Madani and Maulana Maududi were the two principal theorists of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind and Jamaat-e-Islami, respectively. These two organisations represent two major streams within the Islamist political sphere in South Asia. One is regarded as the principal caravan of the Deobandi tradition, while the other—though outside the Deoband institutional framework—has also been highly influential in political circles. At the time of the Partition in 1947, both streams, as well as their leading theorists Madani and Maududi, wielded comparable influence. Both opposed the Pakistan Movement, though from different positions.

Ironically, the younger activists of these traditions today often present themselves as part of a lineage that supported the creation of Pakistan. In the years leading up to Partition, M. A. Jinnah was sharply criticised by both streams—sometimes even at a personal level. We briefly discussed this issue in the previous two instalments. The British benefited considerably from this three-way conflict, and many scholars have already shown that this triangular dispute played a facilitating role in the eventual partition of India (and Bengal). It is worth noting that during the 1937 elections, Jinnah once appointed Madani as a member of the Muslim League’s Parliamentary Board, at a time when the Pakistan Movement had not yet gathered momentum. However, once politics rapidly shifted in that direction, Madani

soon resigned from the position. Today’s third instalment, however, examines another intriguing dimension of the ideological debates surrounding 1947 among parties claiming Islamic political representation. Although Maududi and Madani were united in their opposition to Jinnah on the Pakistan question, they were sharply divided over the emancipation of Muslim society and the future of India. While today in Bangladesh the Deobandi tradition and Jamaat-e-Islami often appear politically close, the situation in 1947 was quite different. At that time, Maulana Maududi, Maulana Madani, and their respective followers deeply divided Muslim society. As noted earlier, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind was formed by anti-colonial scholars who regarded the struggle for India’s independence as a primary duty of Muslims. They supported independence while keeping India united. Because of this position, the Jamiat functioned as an ally of the Indian National Congress and was often described as “Indian nationalist” or “composite nationalist.” By contrast, Jinnah’s Muslim League was founded on the idea of “Muslim nationalism,” while Maududi was a fierce critic of all forms of nationalism. During this period, especially in the 1930s, many Deobandi scholars were reluctant to accept Maududi’s religious interpretations of Islam, arguing that he lacked formal training in these disciplines—although in the previous decade he had been closely associated with Deoband. In fact, the Jamiat’s weekly newspaper Al-Jamiat had once been published under his editorship. Meanwhile, Madani was at this time an admirer of Gandhi. After Gandhi returned from South

Africa, Madani stood alongside him during the Khilafat Movement alliance. At that time Gandhi had not yet formally assumed full leadership of the Congress. In June 1920, the Deobandi scholars of Bombay organised a reception for Gandhi on his return from Africa. Madani’s teacher, Mahmudul Hasan, issued a fatwa encouraging Muslims to participate in Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement.

The closeness between Gandhi and the Deoband scholars, including Madani, later translated into political proximity between the Jamiat and the Congress, and as a consequence their opposition to the Muslim League. This opposition was fundamentally ideological. In January 1938, Madani argued that the concepts of qum or ummah represented Islam’s notion of community, yet in the contemporary world nationality (qawmiyyat) was determined primarily by territory rather than lineage or religion. In other words, India itself constituted the homeland (millat) of Muslims, and they did not require a separate territory to form their community. On this basis, they opposed the Lahore Resolution. The Jamiat’s position was that while the global Muslim ummah included all Muslims worldwide, Indian Muslims as a nation had to seek solutions to their problems within the geographical boundaries of India. Being part of the ummah did not prevent Muslims from also being part of Indian nationality. Although Maulana Madani and Maulana Maududi stood almost side by side in opposing the Muslim League’s efforts to create a separate state of Pakistan by partitioning India, they disagreed sharply on many related issues. Maududi, in particular, was a strong opponent of Madani’s idea

of “composite nationalism,” and he even described Madani’s views on the matter as being of “inferior quality.” (Upamahadesher Swadhinata Andolon o Musalman, Khondo-1, Adhunik Prokashoni, p. 273.) While the Muslim League was advancing the idea of a separate territorial homeland for Muslims, and Madani was calling for Hindus and Muslims to struggle together against colonial rule and achieve independence jointly, Maududi positioned himself against both and began advocating a distinct nizam, or Islamic order. Maududi urged Muslims to distance themselves from existing political currents, including both the League and the Congress, at least until the Islamic order he envisioned was established. Madani described such recommendations as utopian. (Barbara D. Metcalf, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Jamaat Ulama-i-Hind, in Muslims against the Muslim League:

Critiques of the idea of Pakistan, Edited by Ali Usman Qasmi and Megan Robb, Cambridge, 2017, p. 45.) He argued that it was a mistaken position for some Muslims to declare the struggle for independence—conducted through ethnic and national unity—as haram and to discourage participation in it. To justify his stance on religious grounds, Madani frequently referred to the example of Muslims living in Medina under a covenant with the Jewish communities. Similarly, Maududi opposed Madani’s notion of Hindu-Muslim “composite nationalism” or shared culture, contending that art, architecture, and other cultural expressions were not true markers of civilisation. Muslims, he argued, were bearers of a distinct civilisa-

tion because their worldview was fundamentally different; they perceived the role of life in the world in a distinctive way. (On this issue, Ali Usman Qasmi analyses Maududi’s views by citing a statement from the March 1933 issue of Tarjuman-ul-Qur’an (p. 26). See: “Differentiating between Pakistan and Napak-istan,” in Muslims against the Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan, edited by Ali Usman Qasmi and Megan Robb, Cambridge, 2017, p. 112.) According to Maududi, those who were truly Muslim and determined to preserve their Muslim identity should refrain from invoking nationalism or territorial patriotism, and should separate themselves from ongoing movements that sought to dissolve Islamic nationality into geographical nationalism. (Upamahadesher Swadhinata Andolon o Musalman, Khondo-1, Adhunik Prokashoni, p. 152.) For him, the demand that the subjugated peoples of India should jointly seek independence under the banner of an Indian national consciousness amounted to a rejection of Islamic creed. In his view, the advocates of composite nationalism were attempting to strip Muslim men and women of their Islamic identity. (Upamahadesher Swadhinata Andolon o Musalman, Khondo-1, Adhunik Prokashoni, p. 199.) Entering this debate, Maulana Maududi also criticised the freedom fighter Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi, a follower of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. To rally Muslims against the Madani camp, Maududi employed several rhetorical strategies, one of which was the invocation of the threat of communism. During this period he warned that, although the Congress was Indian nationalist in form, it was ideologically communist and culturally English, and that Muslim youth would gradually become drawn to these influences.

They would, he cautioned, begin replacing traditional forms of address with new ones, greeting others with namaste instead of “good morning,” and wearing the Gandhi cap instead of the hat. (Tarjuman-ul-Qur’an, March 1937, p. 14; April 1937, pp. 12–13) Elsewhere, he described “swadeshi nationalism” as a blueprint for a way of life that was essentially a confused mixture of Hindu and socialist ideologies, arguing that adopting such nationalism would amount to abandoning Muslim identity. (Upamahadesher Swadhinata Andolon o Musalman, Khondo-1, Adhunik Prokashoni, p. 73.)

Many promises, inconsistent results

The interim government has introduced 77 reform measures across the financial sector, covering planning, finance, commerce, industry, labour, and power and energy. The initiatives helped ease some macroeconomic pressures, as falling foreign exchange reserves stabilised and inflation showed signs of moderation. Yet, vital reforms in the banking and revenue sectors moved slowly from planning to implementation. For instance, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) proposed amendments or new laws for seven areas, but only two – the Bank Resolution Act and Bank Deposit Protection Ordinance – were enacted. Even though the Bank Resolution Act was passed in May last year, Sammilito Islami Bank, the new state-owned shariah-based lender formed through the merger of five troubled banks, has not fully started operations. While repayments to depositors of the five banks have begun, no management team has been appointed for the merged bank. Key proposals, such as amendments to the Bangladesh Bank Order-1972 and the Bank Company Act, critical for banking governance, have not progressed. These were not even included in the government’s new reform book, leaving their future uncertain. Yesterday, the government published the reform book, listing achievements in public service, health and education, energy, science and IT, finance, culture, and transport. In the financial sector, measures include revisions to insurance agent regulations and solvency margin rules for life and non-life insurers. M Masrur Reaz, chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange Bangladesh, said the reforms undertaken so far are insufficient to support the private sector, which dominates the country’s economy. In a significant move to enhance trade fairness and growth, the government introduced the Commercial Court Ordinance, 2026, establishing specialised courts with document-based trials, 90-day case disposal, mediation, virtual hearings, and online case management, according to the book. Towfiqul Islam Khan, additional research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), described some reforms as “broken.” “As the financial sector reforms were not consulted with political parties, there is doubt they will survive under a future government,” he said. Khan also cited issues in the implementation process of public projects, which lack integrity checks and proper feasibility assessments. He hoped the next elected government would continue reform efforts, and said that political stability depends on economic stability. The interim government said it conducted inclusive political dialogue over seven months, culminating in the July Charter, which now awaits approval through a referendum. The Charter aims to entrench fundamental rights, checks and balances, and safeguards against authoritarianism. “These reforms mark the first steps toward a reimagined system of governance – one that serves citizens rather than dominates them,” the government said. Asif Ibrahim, former president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), said the interim government stabilised the economy during a challenging transition. Its focus on fiscal discipline, inflation management, and financial sector oversight restored market confidence. “Private investment momentum remained cautious, and longer-term issues related to competitiveness, productivity, and employment were only partially addressed,” he said. The administration laid a foundation of stability, leaving broader growth-oriented reforms to the next government. Taskeen Ahmed, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI), praised initiatives promoting a digital, rules-based business environment. Key measures included the BanglaBiz platform, Bangladesh Single Window for one-day licensing, Green Channel customs automation, extended bonded warehouse facilities, and the Tax Expenditure Policy. He said legal predictability and investor confidence were strengthened by the National Strategy for Attracting FDI, specialised commercial courts, the Merchant Power Policy, and English versions of tax laws. “Labour, ADR, and the Governance Performance Monitoring System further reduced business costs and replaced ad-hoc decision-making with transparent systems.” But the president of Dhaka chamber criticised the government’s decision to maintain the 2026 LDC graduation timeline, ignoring calls from the business community to delay it until 2032. Stalled structural reforms, such as the revenue board split and the lack of full autonomy for the Bangladesh Bank, continue to generate financial uncertainty, according to the business leader.

bedding our presence into the very fabric of national life. Years from now, the memory of this day will stay. You will remember the issues you cared about, the conversations you had, and the changes you wanted to see, and you will either remember taking part or wishing you had. Every person who shows up shapes what happens. Showing up is simple, but its consequences last far longer than any online debate, any thread, any post. So, I have decided that I will vote not for a party, but for the candidate whose vision, integrity, and values feel real to me. I will take the time, stand in line, and cast my vote with intention, knowing it is my small, deliberate claim on the future. I will ask my friends to do the same, because every presence matters. I want to remember this day as one where I showed up and took responsibility for the world I live in. I want to look back and know that I added my voice to the chorus shaping our country, what I and my generation deserve. Voting will not solve everything, but it is the first step toward a future we can influence. And when years from now I think of this moment, I want it to feel alive in memory, not as a question of what might have been, but as proof that I acted, mattered, and stood, fully present, when the country asked for it.

US crude over Russian oil How Trump’s 25% tariff cut is forcing a massive shift for Indian refiners

New Delhi: India is set to gradually pare back its crude oil purchases from Russia following an understanding reached with the United States that helped ease trade tensions between the two countries. While the shift marks a significant policy signal, the transition is expected to be measured rather than abrupt, given the operational realities of India’s refining sector.

The move comes after US President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Friday rescinding a punitive 25 per cent duty on all imports from India, citing New Delhi’s commitment to stop importing Russian oil. However, people familiar with the matter said Indian refiners have not received any formal written directive to immediately halt Russian purchases and are instead being nudged to slowly reduce future orders. Reliance Industries recently bought 2 million barrels of Venezuelan oil from trader Vitol, Reuters reported. This is Reliance Industries’ first purchase from the South American nation in nearly a year. According to PTI, Indian refiners have been informally advised to stop placing fresh orders for Russian crude while continuing to honour existing purchase commitments. These contracts are typically finalised six to eight weeks in advance, meaning Russian oil will continue to flow into India for the time being. Some public-sector refiners had already moved away from Russian oil following earlier US sanctions. Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals



Ltd (MRPL), and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd (HMEL) stopped buying Russian crude soon after Washington sanctioned key Russian exporters last year. Others, including Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), are now expected to wind down their exposure in a phased manner. Reliance Industries Ltd, India’s largest buyer of Russian oil, had paused purchases late last year after sanctions were imposed on Rosneft and Lukoil. According to PTI, Sources said it is likely to fully cease buying Russian crude again once a resumed cargo of 1,50,000 barrels is delivered in the coming weeks.

Despite these developments, officials at the Oil Ministry have declined to comment, while the Commerce Ministry and the Ministry of External Affairs have not publicly addressed the commitments made

regarding Russian oil. One notable outlier in this transition is Nayara Energy, which is partly owned by Russia’s Rosneft. Nayara has been sanctioned by the European Union and the UK, making it difficult for the company to source crude from most global suppliers. As a result, it is effectively forced to continue buying Russian oil from non-sanctioned entities. Sources told PTI that Nayara’s situation was explained to US trade officials during discussions in December, and the company may need to be granted an exemption or special dispensation under any broader “no Russian oil” policy. India’s imports of Russian crude had already been declining even before the latest understanding with Washington. Shipments averaged about 1.2 million barrels per day in December 2025, down from a peak of around 2.1 million barrels per day in May 2023. Vol-

umes fell further to roughly 1.1 million barrels per day in January and are expected to dip below 1 million barrels per day in the coming months. With the new agreement in place, sources told PTI that imports could eventually be cut by nearly half. Analysts, however, caution that a sharp near-term drop is unlikely. According to Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst, Refining and Modeling at Kpler, the impact will be gradual. “Russian volumes remain largely locked in for the next 8-10 weeks and continue to be economically critical for India’s complex refining system, supported by deep discounts on Urals relative to Brent. Imports are expected to stay broadly stable in the 1.1-1.3 million barrels a day range through Q1 and early Q2,” he said, according to PTI.

Prashant Vasisht of Icria said the India-US trade deal could also open up alternative sourcing options. “For the Indian refining sector, there are ample avenues, including the US, to purchase crude as Russian crude accounted for less than 2 per cent of Indian crude imports prior to FY2023.” He added that replacing Russian oil with market-priced crude would raise India’s import bill by less than 2 per cent, while Venezuelan heavy and sour crudes could emerge as another cost-effective option.

For now, India appears to be walking a careful line—balancing geopolitical commitments with energy security—signalling change without risking disruption to its fuel supply.

Silchar-Sairang passenger train will be flagged off View the whole itinerary



New Delhi: In a welcome development for the Northeast, the much-awaited Silchar-Sairang passenger train will be flagged off today (February 9), BJP’s Rajya Sabha MP Kanad Purkayastha announced via social media on Sunday. The train promises easier travel between Assam’s Barak Valley and Mizoram.

The MP confirmed that Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw will join the launch virtually via video conferencing. As per an official release, the flag-off ceremony at Sairang Railway Station in Mizoram will be at-

tended by Chief Minister Lalduhoma, Purkayastha, among other senior railway officials and dignitaries. For many in the region, this isn’t just another train service. It’s a long-awaited lifeline. “My sincere gratitude to Shri Vaishnaw ji for this gift to us,” Purkayastha said in a Facebook post. The new route will connect Silchar in Assam to Sairang, the railhead closest to Mizoram’s capital, Aizawl. Until now, most travellers have had to depend on long, winding road journeys through hilly terrain, often disrupted by bad weather or landslides. Students heading to colleges, patients travelling for treatment, traders moving goods and families making routine trips are all likely to benefit from the new service.

The train will run along the recently completed Bairabi-Sairang rail link, a major infrastructure project aimed at bringing Mizoram more firmly onto India’s railway map. For a region where geography has long slowed connectivity projects, the development marks a significant milestone. Officials say the impact could go beyond passenger convenience. Better rail access is expected to improve the flow of essential goods, reduce transportation costs and strengthen trade between Assam and Mizoram. There is also optimism that easier access will give a boost to tourism and small businesses in the region.

However, the biggest change for local residents may simply be peace of mind. The new rail link offers a dependable alternative to uncertain road travel, especially during the monsoon months. The launch also fits into the Centre’s broader push to strengthen infrastructure across the Northeast and improve its integration with the national transport network.

Swiggy begins rolling back Instamart fee waivers, reinstates handling

New Delhi: Swiggy has begun reversing its fee waiver campaign on Instamart, reinstating handling charges on all orders and tying surge fee waivers to its subscription programme, weeks after management admitted the experiment showed “limited adoption and retention.

“The changes, visible on the app, marks a retreat from the aggressive discounting war in quick commerce that Zepto kicked off late last year by waiving handling, delivery and surge charges for orders above Rs 99. While it recently raised the free delivery threshold to Rs 149, handling fees remain waived regardless of cart value. Swiggy had immediately responded with its own fee waiver campaign eliminating all customer facing charges for orders above Rs 299. But unlike Zepto, which has maintained its handling fee waiver, Swiggy has now reinstated the charge. The move comes as Swiggy’s quick commerce business is targeting contribution margin breakeven by the end of Q1FY27. Instamart now charges a handling fee of Rs 7-10 on all orders regardless of cart size. Additionally, surge fee waivers—previously available to all users above the Rs 299 threshold—are now restricted to Swiggy One subscribers. During its Q3 FY26 earnings call, chief financial



officer Rahul Bothra had said that around 90 basis points of structural margin improvement, or roughly Rs 70-80 crore had been reinvested into the no-fee campaign. Instamart CEO Amitesh Jha had said the campaign has not attracted the ideal type of growth, distinguishing between customers who remain sticky to the platform versus those who switch based on discounts. “Wherever we have seen a growth in orders for any of these platforms, the basket sizes have not increased. In fact, it has

gone down by a lot,” he had told analysts. Breakeven Countdown

Swiggy’s quick commerce business reported a contribution margin of negative 2.1% in Q3 FY26. The company needs to improve contribution margins by 250 basis points over the next two quarters to achieve its breakeven guidance. The partial rollback suggests Swiggy is testing which fees it can reinstate without triggering significant customer churn. By keeping delivery fee waivers intact for Swiggy One members

above Rs 199 while bringing back handling charges universally, the company appears to be using its subscription programme as the primary vehicle for retaining price-sensitive users. In terms of competition, market leader Blinkit had long resisted any customer fee waivers. However, recently it has begun experimenting with lower delivery fees in select pincodes to protect market share. Swiggy did not respond to a request for comment till the time of going to the press.

Banks rely on bulk deposits as retail dries up



New Delhi: When retail deposits are not growing enough, banks have increased their dependence on bulk or wholesale deposits to meet higher credit demand. For example, Bank of Baroda’s bulk deposits (including certificate of deposits) grew 18.6% on year, while retail term deposits grew merely 9.8% year-over-year, as of December 31. Similarly, for CSB Bank, the numbers have been going up for the last few quarters. Currently, in the December quarter, it was 47% compared to 37% a year ago, while the share of retail deposits reduced to 53% from 61% a year ago. Even Bank of India’s share inched up to 16% as on December-end from 13% a quarter ago, and the share of retail deposits reduced to 46.38% from 47.41% a quarter ago.

Small finance banks have also raised their reliance on bulk deposits. AU Small Finance Bank’s term bulk deposits grew 41.5% on year and 6.7% on quarter, while retail deposits grew 12.8% on year and 3.3% on quarter. Ujjivan Small Finance Bank’s bulk deposits grew 39% year-on-year and 12% quarter-on-quarter. Bulk deposits—typically large sums from institutions or corporates—come at higher costs but provide quick liquidity to banks. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) defines bulk deposits as deposits above Rs 3 crore. Small banks, along with select larger ones, are actively engaged in this, according to industry people. As deposits’ growth lagged credit growth, banks are forced to depend on other avenues to bridge the gap. The gap between credit and growth widened to 251 basis points (bps) compared to an average of 171 bps during October-December. Bank credit grew 13.11%, while deposits rose 10.6% as on January 15, according to the latest RBI data. Consequently, credit–deposit (CD) ratio jumped to a multi-decadal high of 82.17%. “Raising bulk deposits is a necessity now. We are in the process of building our retail deposit franchise following a full tech-stack overhaul, which will take 18–24 months. Until then, we will use bulk deposits tactically, mostly for shorter tenures of 6–12 months, without locking ourselves into long-term high-cost funding,” said Pralay Mondal, MD & CEO, CSB Bank. Banks continue to struggle in garnering low-cost CASA deposits, as the low-interest environment and investors’ shift to alternative options persist. With the sluggish deposit growth, banks have also ramped their CD issuanc-

es. Banks issued Rs 64,410 crore in CDs during the fortnight ending January 31, pushing outstanding volumes to a record Rs 5.89 lakh crore, the RBI data showed. Rising Costs An asset-liability management dealer at a public sector bank said they are active in both CD (certificate of deposits) and bulk deposits. “We are also depending heavily on wholesale deposits and it has grown by 7-8% in January. For one-year bulk deposits, we are now paying a 50 bps premium over retail rates—up from the earlier 20-25 bps spread due to higher competition,” he said.

An official at a private bank said that there are couple of large banks and small banks which are bidding aggressively at high rates for bulk deposits, especially after December. He added that, consequently, the pricing has increased by around 35 bps and will likely to stay elevated as advance growth will be aggressive in the March quarter. According to V R C Reddy, treasury head at Karur Vysya Bank, structural changes in retail depositor behaviour have led to increased reliance on CDs and bulk deposits. “However, CD issuance remains constrained by rating-agency approved limits, unlike bulk deposits, which are not subject to such caps. Consequently, some banks may be increasingly compelled to tap bulk deposits in place of CDs. Bulk deposits could emerge as a relatively easier funding avenue, particularly for small and mid-sized banks, albeit at a higher cost compared to regular retail deposits and CDs issued by frontline banks,” he said.

Due to the prevailing market conditions, bulk deposit rates have also gone up. Reddy added that, one year bulk deposits are quoting at a spread of 50–60 bps over retail deposit rates currently, compared with par to 25 bps earlier.

Earlier, banks were reducing reliance on high-cost, volatile bulk deposits to protect their margins. However, if retail deposits fail to grow sufficiently, banks will have no choice but to rely more heavily on wholesale deposits. “Reliance on bulk or wholesale deposits is set to persist if credit growth continues to outpace deposit growth. The competition for deposit is driving up pricing and premiums. This would result in higher cost of deposit for banks in a tight liquidity scenario,” said Anil Gupta, senior vice President & co-group head, ICRA.

Ikea taps mid-sized stores in India growth push

New Delhi: Furniture retailer Ikea is looking to set up new stores in the range of 50,000-70,000 sq ft in the country, which will sit comfortably between its smaller stores (15,000-20,000 sq ft) and big-box retail outlets (4 lakh sq ft), Adosh Sharma, country commercial manager at Ikea India told FE in an interaction. Best-known for its ‘blue-box’ destination stores worldwide and in Indian cities such as Hyderabad, Navi Mumbai and Bengaluru, Ikea’s tweaks come as the retailer looks to grow its presence in the country using a multi-format retail footprint. It is also placing emphasis on building an omni-channel retail model, where consumers can “shop 24 by 7 or visit a store”, focusing on availability and accessibility. While smaller stores, say industry sources, has been a focal point for the retailer in recent years as it sought to scale up operations quickly, the limitation has been in terms of offering a bigger range without compromising

on convenience. Mid-sized stores are expected to take care of this need. The move is also timed with Ikea’s broader plan of more than doubling its investments in India to over Rs 20,000 crore (\$2.2 billion) in the next five years, expanding physical as well as online retail and improving local sourcing. Currently, the retailer has six physical stores in India, which it aims to take to 30 by 2030. Online sales account for over 30% of the retailer’s India sales now, which it hopes to take to 40% in five years. Together (online and offline), the retailer reaches 80 cities currently, with six including Mumbai, Pune, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai, having focus markets for it. “Over the last three years, we’ve invested a lot of time understanding what formats work best in India. The answer is multiple formats will work here that will take care of different customer needs. We’re currently developing stores in the 50,000–70,000 sq. ft. range. These will sit between the two extremes of small and large stores and serve specific communities,” Sharma said. Big-box retail stores, meanwhile, are expected to continue being destinations for families, where they can shop and have a fun day out. The retailer, for instance, is set to open big-box retail stores in Gurugram and Noida each in the future. A 15,000-sq.ft. smaller store, meanwhile, was opened at Pacific Mall in West Delhi in 2025 to cater to the catchment located there. A fourth format, which are planning and order points, are focused on customers who want to design homes or complex solutions without distraction, Sharma says. “India is not one market; it is many markets in one. We’re taking a measured approach. We’re not racing to open hundreds of stores. Getting the model right is far more important,” he said. The need to stay disciplined with store expansion, say experts, also comes as Ikea looks to get profitable in India.

Class barriers crude definition

Kwara: Re the proposal that class should become a protected characteristic (Editorial, 30 January), my son is 21. He is studying bio-chemistry and is in the final year of a four-year course. He is job-seeking. In that endeavour, he has had the misfortune to have been born to professional parents.His mother (me) is a solicitor and his father an accountant. He went to a selective state grammar school – the very type of school designed to create social mobility. He lives in a “good” postcode and never had free school meals. As a result, his job opportunities seem to be limited. The eligibility requirements of many job advertisements in biosciences exclude him because of his selective school. For some applications, he must give his parents’ postcode, their job titles and level of education. It seems designed to exclude him from the first sift.

The injustice is that both of us (his parents) strived hard from working-class backgrounds. We started from nothing and used vigour, drive and determination, together with a strong work ethic, to gain the returns we have made. Our son is instilled with the same ethics and drive, but he will be excluded from the same chances, because of our efforts.Bring on “class” as a protected characteristic. The only problem will be defining what that is. We might be professionals, but we are definitely working class – and so is our son.

Name and address supplied The problem of



declining representation of the working class at top levels extends far beyond the arts (Report sets out ‘blueprint for change’ to increase working-class representation in the arts, 26 January). It is no coincidence that the decline is contemporary, with the introduction of comprehensive education in the 1970s.In the early 1960s, I attended a leading independent school, where about half the pupils were fully funded by the county council. I then attended an Oxford

college where a majority of students came from state grammar schools, mostly in the north of England. These students went on to play leading roles in society. Such opportunities no longer exist.A well-intended reform to improve opportunity for all seems to have had the opposite effect. To have any chance of lasting success, the “class ceiling” movement will have to bite the bullet and undertake a radical review of secondary education in the UK.

Shot, Harassed & Threatened: U.S. Citizens Describe Surviving Violent Attacks by Immigration Agents

Garmany: U.S. citizens who have had violent encounters with federal immigration agents deployed in cities across the U.S. testified before Congress on Tuesday. Amid harrowing testimony by three victims and the brothers of Renee Good, congressional Democrats offered apologies and promises of accountability. Not a single Republican lawmaker showed up to the hearing.Renee Good’s brothers Brent

and Luke Ganger both testified at the hearing, with Brent Ganger calling Good “unapologetically hopeful.”Marimar Martinez was shot multiple times by Border Patrol agents.They shattered the windows, and in that moment the whole world felt like it was the size of the inside of our pick-up, and we were sitting in harm’s way with nothing to do but record the horrifying experience,” he said.

Weather tracker: Spain and Portugal hit by third deadly storm in two weeks

Garmany: Spain and Portugal have endured another storm over the weekend, just days after the deadly flooding and major damage caused by Storm Kristin and Storm Leonardo last week. Storm Marta passed over the Iberian peninsula on Saturday, bringing fresh torrential rain and killing two people. Storm Kristin killed at least five people after it made landfall on 28 January with Storm Leonardo claiming another victim last Wednesday.The outlook for this week is for more rain across Spain, Portugal and France, especially across north-west Portugal, where more than 100mm is possible during the first half of the week. Some of the heaviest of the rain will transfer to southern Italy and western parts of Greece and Turkey later in the week.High rainfall totals are also expected across parts of South Africa and Lesotho this week. By Saturday, provinces including the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape in South Africa could record fairly widespread rainfall totals of 80-100mm as a result of heavy showers or thunderstorms, with daily rainfall totals perhaps reaching 50mm where storms are particularly intense.

Already, the South African Weather Service has issued warnings and advisories

for severe thunderstorms through the first half of this week with a risk of excessive lightning, gusty winds, and hail. As a result, flooding, mudslides, and infrastructure damage is expected, potentially affecting more than 10 million people.Japan and Korea continued to be gripped by cold weather last week as temperatures remained below average, reaching a peak over the weekend. Temperatures in Tokyo fell to almost 10C below average on Sunday as temperatures struggled to rise above zero, with snow falling too.Tokyo sits on a similar latitude to the most northern parts of Africa and Athens, but despite this, snow is not unheard of, occurring on average about once or twice a year. This is due to Japan being positioned between a cold northerly flow from continental eastern Asia, as well as a supply of moisture from both the Sea of Japan to the north and the Philippine Sea to the south.Western areas of Japan tend to see the most significant snowfall, as was the case this time with the Hokuriku region seeing more than 50cm in 24 hours. Temperatures are expected to quickly rise through later this week, reaching the mid to high teens in Tokyo by the weekend.

Trump calls Bad Bunny’s Super Bowl performance ‘absolutely terrible’

Garmany: A Venezuelan migrant whose detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sparked a protest that involved nearly 2,000 people and led to 30 arrests is free after spending seven months in custody in Washington state, after a ruling from a federal judge who said his constitutional rights had been violated.Joswar Torres, 29, was granted humanitarian parole in the United States and had an asylum application pending, but was nevertheless detained in June 2025 after a routine check-in at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) office in Spokane, Washington. Maine, the US’s whitest state, has been shaken by the Trump administration’s immigration crack-down, a crackdown that could threaten Republican control of the Senate in November’s crucial mid-term elections. In other news, Ghislaine Maxwell is expected to plead the fifth amendment to avoid self-incrimination during her deposition in front of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee later today, according to a letter from Democratic congressman Ro Khanna to the committee chair.Maxwell was found guilty in 2021 for her role in helping Jeffrey Epstein sexually abuse teenage girls and is serving a 20-year prison sentence.Instead of answering individual questions, Maxwell intends to read a prepared statement at the beginning of her deposition, Khanna, who serves on the committee, said without detailing the source of his information.“This position appears inconsistent with Ms. Maxwell’s prior conduct, as she did not invoke the fifth amendment when she previously met with deputy attorney general Todd Blanche to discuss substantially similar subject matter,” Khanna wrote in his letter seeking clarification on her testimony.

The case garnered national attention after pro-

testers attempted to block an ICE transport that carried Torres and another migrant to Tacoma. The protest turned contentious at times, with a government car’s windshield smashed and tire slashed, but for the most part it was peaceful, with demonstrators linking arms as they faced down masked federal agents.A month after the protest, federal prosecutors took the unusual step of bringing conspiracy charges against nine of the demonstrators. Legal experts said the episode marked an escalation in the Trump administration’s crackdown on first amendment rights. Richard Barker, a career justice department prosecutor, resigned as acting US attorney for eastern Washington state rather than sign the indictments. “No one was hurt,” Barker said. “You have people who were executing their rights to free speech. You have people who were seeing an injustice and they were saying something about it.” Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) agents launched “Operation Catch of the Day” in the state on 21 January, targeting “the worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens who have terrorized communities”, according to the administration. As critics said the operation had caused “pain and suffering”, Senator Susan Collins, a Republican facing a re-election this year in a state that voted for Kamala Harris in 2024, claimed she spoke with Kristi Noem, the homeland security secretary, who told her the operation has ended at her request.But residents doubt Collins has defanged ICE and say the agency is still making its presence known and causing chaos in the bucolic state nicknamed Vacationland. His two-day trip to Armenia, which begins later on Monday, comes just six months after the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders signed an agreement at

the White House seen as the first step towards peace after nearly 40 years of war, Reuters reports.Vance, the first US vice-president to visit Armenia, is seeking to advance the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIIPP), a proposed 43km (27 mile) corridor that would run across southern Armenia and give Azerbaijan a direct route to its exclave of Nakhchivan and in turn to Turkey, Baku’s close ally.“Vance’s visit should serve to reaffirm the US’s commitment to seeing the Trump route through,” said Joshua Kucera, a senior South Caucasus analyst at Crisis Group.“In a region like the Caucasus, even a small amount of attention from the US can make a significant impact.”“I don’t think anyone here has any trust that will be lasting,” Matt Schlobohm, executive director of the Maine AFL-CIO, a state federation of more than 200 local labor unions in Maine. “You can’t turn a tiger into a vegetarian.”Workers and labor unions in Maine claimed ICE is racially profiling people and has created an environment where people of color are under “an occupation” impeding their freedom of movement. US energy secretary Chris Wright plans to visit Venezuela soon to “start the dialogue” with officials on the future leadership of Venezuelan oil company PDVSA, Politico reported on Monday.Wright, who plans to visit some of the nation’s oilfields, told Politico: “PDVSA was a highly professional, technically competent oil and gas company 30 years ago, and it hasn’t been one for quite some time.”He intended to improve the management of the state-run oil company which has emerged as an obstacle in the Trump administration’s efforts to push international oil companies to invest in the country, the report said.

Drones and Missiles Strike Ukraine’s Cities Infrastructure

Garmany: Russia fired hundreds of drones and missiles overnight in attacks on Ukraine’s capital Kyiv and cities including Kharkiv and Sumy.

At least four people were wounded in Kyiv when Russian missiles slammed into apartment blocks and a building housing a kindergarten. Elsewhere, Russian strikes targeted energy infrastructure, despite winter temperatures dipping to below zero degrees Fahrenheit.

Russia’s attacks came as Ukrainian and Russian officials prepare to meet with U.S. officials in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday for talks on a deal to end Russia’s war on Ukraine, which is approaching its fourth anniversary. President Trump said Monday the Republican Party should “nationalize” voting in the United States, as he continued to make false claims about alleged illegal voting and his 2020 defeat by Joe Biden.

Trump’s remarks came in an interview with Dan Bongino, who recently resigned his post as FBI deputy director to return to his right-wing podcast.President Donald Trump: “The Republicans should say we want to take over. We should take over the voting, the voting in at least — many — 15 places. The Republicans ought to nationalize the voting.”Under the Constitution, U.S. elections are governed by states and administered by county and municipal officials in thousands of precincts.Trump’s

remarks came as officials in Fulton County, Georgia, promised legal action after Trump’s FBI last week seized truckloads of ballots and documents from the 2020 election. County Commissioner Marvin Arrington Jr. said attorneys would ask a federal judge for an order mandating the return of property that was unlawfully seized or retained.Marvin Arrington Jr.: “

Gabbard met with agents from the FBI’s field office in Atlanta overseeing the election inquiry and that Gabbard used her cellphone to call President Trump, who spoke to the agents on speakerphone, praising and thanking them for their work. Former Justice Department official David Laufman told the Times,

“It is extremely dangerous to our democracy and a shocking abandonment of years of sound policy for the president to be directly involved in the conduct of domestic criminal investigations, especially one that seeks to redress his personal grievances and to make the director of national intelligence an instrument of his political will.”The incident happened at 5pm so we know the area was also busy with motorists driving along Oxford Street,” Granville said. Earlier on Wednesday, Liz Kendall, the MP for Leicester West and a cabinet minister, said she was “aware” of a “serious incident” that had taken place and her thoughts were with those affected.

53 dead or missing after migrant boat capsizes in Mediterranean

Garmany: The UN migration agency said 53 people had died or were missing after a boat capsized in the Mediterranean Sea off the Libyan coast. Only two survivors were rescued.The International Organization for Migration said the boat overturned north of Zuwara on Friday.“Only two Nigerian women were rescued during a search and rescue operation by Libyan authorities,” the IOM said in a statement, adding that one of the survivors said she lost her husband and the other said she had “lost her two babies in the tragedy”.

The IOM said its teams provided the two survivors with emergency medical care.“According to survivor accounts, the boat – carrying migrants and refugees

of African nationalities departed from Al-Zawiya, Libya, at about 11pm on 5 February. Approximately six hours later, it capsized after taking on water,” the agency said.“IOM mourns the loss of life in yet another deadly incident along the central Mediterranean route.”The Geneva-based agency said trafficking and smuggling networks were exploiting migrants along the route from north Africa to southern Europe, profiting from dangerous crossings in unseaworthy boats while exposing people to “severe abuse”.It called for stronger international cooperation to tackle the networks, alongside safe and regular migration pathways to reduce risks and save lives.

Malawi businesses close in protest over tax changs



Kwara: Demonstrations across Malawi’s four main cities during the past week have achieved a delay in the introduction of a new tax regime that business owners claim will cripple their livelihoods.Tens of thousands had signed petitions which this week were presented to tax officials and on Monday thousands of small traders shut up shops and businesses to hold protest marches in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Zomba and Mzuzu.

The actions have achieved a delay in the rollout of the electronic invoicing system (EIS) introduced by the Malawi Revenue Authority, a more detailed tax regime than existed previously. Due to be introduced this week, a transition to the system has now been postponed until April.It was the latest sign of unrest in a country facing significant problems tackling aid cuts, foreign currency shortages, and resulting rises in the cost of necessities. Protests over food and fuel prices in September and November were hijacked by political groups, with outbreaks of violence.President Peter Mutharika, elected last year with a promise to restore the economy, has carried out adjustments to fuel, electricity and VAT, with fuel prices rising by 41% and electricity by 12%.

Those who closed their shops and walked to tax offices, dressed in black and carrying placards criticising the revenue authority for prioritising “hitting the target” of revenue collection and “celebrating” while vendors are having to shutter their businesses, are especially struggling through import and export of goods.A shortage of foreign currency, they say, is pushing them to buy the dollar for imports at almost three times the bank rate.“Our businesses are under threat because of the economy,” said Robert Nachamba, a representative of small business owners, after a group of 1,000 protesters delivered their petition at the Blantyre revenue authority offices. “When we think about how tough things are in the country, our pain is that there is a lack of foreign exchange which forces us to buy it on the black market because it is not available in the banks. Now we have already got it at an abnormally high rate and now we need to declare the prices of goods to the tax authorities? This will make the prices of our commodities higher even compared with our neighbouring countries and we don’t need that system,” he said.“We closed our shops and travelled to submit our petitions. That is why they were peaceful because we can’t destroy our own shops.”Malawi’s minister of finance, Joseph Mwanamvekha, has told citizens to “remain resilient” as the government implements tough economic measures to stabilise the economy, cut expenditure and “improve revenue collection”.But economists warn that while the measures are technically rational – including the introduction of the electronic invoicing system to improve administration and combat tax evasion – businesses in the informal sector need to survive.Malawian economist Bertha Bangara-Chikadza told the Guardian: “The [policies] are being implemented under extreme macroeconomic challenges. If the government can use the resulting revenue to stabilise the economy and improve public services, it may indeed be a good step. However, if the increased tax burden fails to translate into improved infrastructure and energy, it risks further straining an economy.”Malawi is the latest in a string of African economies, including Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt and Uganda, to implement mandatory electronic invoicing and “real-time tax reporting systems” as part of a trend to improve revenue collection and reduce fraud.“The country does not have foreign currency in the banks and now the Malawi Revenue Authority is coming with issues that threaten our businesses even further.

Since children’s Interrail passes are free, I took my niece on a rail tour of the magnificent towns of Europe

A year ago, I discovered a bit of a travel hack – that if accompanied by an adult (obviously) children under the age of 12 can explore Europe by train for absolutely zilch. Profoundly susceptible to any sort of bargain, even those that promise a net deficit in the long run, I determined to take advantage of Interrail’s generous offer, despite lacking dependents of the specified vintage. Sourcing someone under 12 was far easier than I’d imagined. When I lodged an enquiry about my 10-year-old niece, asking if Annabelle might be available for an Interrailing stint at Easter, my brother couldn’t sign her up fast enough. (Though he did insist on some caveats: in bed by 10pm, out of bed by 9am, and no watching swearsy Gordon Ramsay shows). But where would we go? Well, after several discussions with my prospective companion over FaceTime (during which she utilised upwards of 100 filters, including one that made her look like Donald Trump), six locations were settled on: Paris, Zurich, Venice, Innsbruck, Berlin and Amsterdam. Annabelle cited Emily in Paris and The Diary of Anne Frank as inspirations, while confessing to a long-term interest in Toblerone. If the itinerary had been up to me, it would have looked a lot different. I’d just finished writing a book, you see, in which I travel to some of the least fashionable cities in Europe, but when I mentioned to Annabelle the likes of Essen and Minsk, she raised one of her eyebrows and held it there for 10 seconds (which is something she does when deeply unimpressed). So, first up, Paris. After checking in at The Hoxton hotel on Rue du Sentier, we quickly got stuck into some snails. (I won’t quote Annabelle’s verdict verbatim, but she likened them to a larger version of something you might find up your nose). A picnic near the Eiffel Tower – during which Annabelle stewed over my explanation as to why there was no point in us joining the massive queue to be elevated skywards (“Are you sure British people aren’t al-

lowed, Uncle Ben?”) – was followed by a rapid ascent up 500 steps to the base of Sacré-Coeur basilica, Annabelle’s alacrity owing to a white lie on my part (I’d said there was a doughnut shop at the top). Our journey to Zurich involved changing at Strasbourg. A seat reservation was required for the first leg at a cost of €10 each. (It’s worth mentioning that Interrail pass-holders have to cough up for seat reservations on certain European train services, and all sleeper berths.) An honest breakdown of what we did during the four-hour run down the eastern flank of France to Switzerland reads as follows: 10 minutes considering the passing landscape, 80 minutes of screen time and roughly 19 games of hangman, in which I was able to smuggle a new pair of words into Annabelle’s evolving vocabulary, namely “exasperation” and “glee”. We spent an hour exploring Zurich’s efforts to become the most eco-friendly city possible (including a hydroelectric power station that got the one-eyebrow treatment from Annabelle), and another sitting by the lake near the fetching old town watching the swans and coots squabble over pretzel scraps. Then I gave Annabelle’s palate the night off choc-

with a miniature human. I stopped trying to have conversations every 10 paces about bridges and sea levels and the role of Garibaldi in the reunification of Italy, and instead handed Annabelle the reins, telling her to lead the way and get us lost. She succeeded with aplomb, getting us lost in just about every gift shop we saw (her appetite for tat is astonishing). Annabelle suffers from a condition known as selective fatigue, which tends to flare up on the way to museums and so on. After a dinner of sardines and gelato (don’t ask), she spent the evening trying to teach me ballet moves, whereas I spent the evening thinking the sooner she starts drinking alcohol the better. The next morning, before we departed for pastures new, I asked Annabelle for an alternative verb to “move on” or “proceed” and she suggested “wobble”, and so it was that we bade Venice farewell and wobbled north to Innsbruck, a charming city of about 130,000-odd citizens surrounded by mountains. Having dumped our bags at Adlers Hotel and wolfed down a schnitzel at a restaurant called Stiftskeller, we took a 20-minute ride up to the peak of Hafelekarspitze, a mountain topping 2,334 metres (7,657ft). We paid our dues to the vista – a pistachio river, a motley crop of rooftops, a ring of Austrian Alps – before commencing a protracted snowball fight that Annabelle would later put forward as the highlight of her trip, a comment that had me wondering if I should

have just taken her to the Snozone in Milton Keynes. We travelled the next day to Berlin, reaching the German capital in time to catch the sunset from the 368-metre tall TV Tower in Alexanderplatz. As I attempted to explain the significance of the Brandenburg Gate and Checkpoint Charlie, an impression that was punctured somewhat when she asked, at the end of my summary, “Can you do this with your tongue?” We proceeded by tram to the KPM Hotel, in the west of the city, which Annabelle gave 10 out of 10, mainly because there was a beanbag in her room. The next morning, a guided bike tour along the Berlin Wall provided an energising lesson on ideological warfare, Helmut Schmidt, David Hasselhoff and the various ways an East German might get over an obstacle. The tour was elevated by the incorporation of curry wurst and cherry trees, and by the good nature of our guide, Phillip. When he asked if Annabelle liked the sound of life in the German Democratic Republic, she quickly and firmly said “sure”, which I later discovered is her go-to response when she hasn’t been listening. The next day, we reached Amsterdam Centraal without fuss, the journey taking less than six hours and requiring neither reservation nor connection. From the station, we enjoyed a pleasant walk to our hotel, even hastily organising an Easter egg hunt when it became apparent that I’d completely forgotten what the resurrection of Christ means to people of a certain age. Over the next day and a bit, we wandered along the canals, tried some Dutch pancakes (poffertjes), and had a butcher’s at the Rembrandts in the Rijksmuseum. No prizes for guessing which of these experiences Annabelle enjoyed the most. In truth, Annabelle was actually rather rude about Rembrandt. Sizing up the great painter’s self-portrait of 1628, she suggested in no uncertain terms that he really shouldn’t have bothered. Annabelle’s verdict on our visit to the Anne Frank House was somewhat more measured. After spending a sobering hour listening to Anne’s story as we navigated the building in which the Franks hid from the Nazis,



she contributed the following to the visitors’ book: “I wish this museum didn’t exist to be honest, but I’m really glad we came.” As we tunnelled from Brussels to London, I could tell some-

thing had occurred to my niece because she was doing a little dance with her eyebrows. “This time next year, I’ll be 11,” she said. “You will.” “Which is still under 12.” “It is.” “Which means

I still won’t cost anything.” “Not quite true, but I take your point.” “So maybe we could do it again?” “Maybe ...” “Only this time we could go to Minsk and Essen and the other places you

wanted to go to.” “I’ll have a word with your dad.” She shrugged, returned to a YouTube video involving Oreos, then said, very quietly and more to herself than to me: “If you must.”

Planning A Valentine’s Glow-Up? Read This Before Booking A Cosmetic Treatment

The days leading up to Valentine’s Day often come with an urge to refresh – clearer skin, sharper contours, a little extra glow. But when it comes to cosmetic treatments, last-minute bookings rarely deliver last-minute miracles. In fact, the most seamless results come from something far less glamorous: planning. From lasers and peels to injectables and skin rejuvenation beauty procedures, timing quietly shapes everything – healing, texture, even how natural the final look feels. Rush it, and you risk redness or uneven results. Plan it well, and the change looks effortless. Start With Realistic Goals “Timing plays a quiet but vital role behind the scenes. Preparation often shapes outcomes more than expected. While skincare procedures can enhance brightness, texture, or tone, they rarely bring sudden transformation,” says Dr. Gaurav Garg, Consultant Dermatologist and Founder of Dermalife

Skin and Hair Clinic, New Delhi. He stresses that cosmetic procedures enhance rather than transform overnight. That means identifying specific concerns – dullness, fine lines, pigmentation or acne marks, and choosing treatments designed for those targets instead of chasing dramatic changes. Consultation First, Always According to Dr. Garg, the most important step happens before any treatment begins: a proper dermatology consultation. Skin behaviour varies widely depending on health history, medications and even daily skincare habits. “Seeing a licensed dermatologist ensures your skin gets properly evaluated. Results from treatments can vary in timing and effect,” he explains. Discussing recovery periods, side effects and when results will actually peak can help avoid awkward scheduling, especially if you have an event circled on the calendar. Medical details matter

more than most people realise. Supplements, blood thinners or certain prescriptions can increase bruising or swelling, extending downtime. Respect The Recovery Window Not all procedures fit neatly into a packed social schedule. Some treatments cause only mild redness; others need days or even weeks for the skin to settle. Sun avoidance, barrier-strengthening skincare and gentle routines often begin weeks before the procedure. “Starting mild skincare habits early supports the skin’s protective layer while lowering chances of discomfort later,” says Dr. Garg. Post-treatment care is equally critical. Sunscreen, hydration and soothing ingredients like ceramides and hyaluronic acid help maintain results, while harsh scrubs and actives should be avoided until healing is complete. Choose Subtle Over Sudden For first-timers, experts rec-



ommend starting conservatively. Small, gradual tweaks tend to look more natural than aggressive changes close to an important date.

That philosophy extends to injectables, too. “It’s important that you seek an expert injector who can explain the treatment that will

aim to provide the best clinical outcome. The reality is the overall facial messages that detract from facial attractiveness and youthful-

ness to look less tired, look less sad, look less saggy, and look less angry,” says Dr. Satish Bhatia, Board-Certified Dermatologist, MD, FAAD, at the Indian Cancer Society, Mumbai. He notes that patients often ask for dramatic transformations, but the real goal is softer. In other words, refinement beats reinvention. The Art Of Looking Like Yourself – Only Better Great aesthetic work should be almost invisible. As Dr. Bhatia puts it, “The facial treatments are focused to produce a balanced and harmonious outcome, both at rest and dynamic movements of the face.” That harmony takes time, skill and thoughtful scheduling. When planned early, cosmetic treatments can quietly elevate your look without the tell-tale signs of last-minute intervention. Because the best Valentine’s glow isn’t dramatic – it’s confident, natural and entirely your own.

Regarding Taking a break From Acting, Pankaj Tripathi



Mumbai: Actor Pankaj Tripathi disclosed that he took a nearly year-long hiatus from movies after a string of ventures left him feeling exhausted and unfulfilled creatively. He discussed his decision to take a break, the type of work he currently wants to do, and how his priorities have evolved over time in an interview

with a media portal.Tripathi claimed that his passion for acting had started to wane due to the relentless pace of filming. He described how his happiness was impacted by the sheer amount of labor and how taking breaks became crucial to his health and artistic endeavors. "I was working back-to-back on projects," the ac-

tor remarked in an interview with Variety India. Fatigue and boredom had begun to creep in. I wasn't having fun at work. It was time for a rest. I've started to be pickier. I leave my house for exciting employment. I'm not interested in taking on every job that is presented to me."At this point in my life, I only act for fun and artistic fulfillment," he continued. I can't do it for survival and EMI. I'd like to continue doing this to see if it benefits me in the long run. According to Tripathi, his selection standards have changed with time, and he now prefers to appear in movies that blend entertainment value with depth. He emphasized that narrative should transcend superficial attraction."Now I want to be a part of entertaining and meaningful cinema," he remarked. There is an entertainment tax in India since the main reason people watch movies is for amusement. However, narrative is more than just amusement. It ought to have something to say, too. The online series Perfect Family has been produced by Pankaj Tripathi. His upcoming film is Mirzapur: The Movie, which opens in theaters on September 4.

In Kolkata, Arijit Singh takes the stage alongside Anoushka Shankar

Mumbai: When Arijit Singh performed with sitar virtuoso Anoushka Shankar on Sunday, February 8, at Kolkata's Netaji Indoor Stadium, he gave the city's supporters a delightful musical surprise. This was Arijit's first public appearance since he declared on January 27 that he was leaving playback singing. On her Instagram, Anoushka Shankar posted a video from the musical event. The singer initially performed Maya Bhora Raati, a Bengali classic originally sung by Lakshmi Shankar and penned by the renowned Pandit Ravi Shankar, with Anoushka and percussionist Bickram Ghosh. Arijit mentioned that he had just spent time writing music with Anoushka at her house.Arijit then sang a heartfelt duet with Anoushka on the song Traces of You, which she co-wrote with global superstar Norah Jones.Arijit modestly said that he was anxious when Anoushka brought him to the stage. "I'm really anxious. He spoke to the cheering audience, "Thank you for having me."The audience was taken to a new reality by the ethereal atmosphere generated by Arijit's captivating voice and Anoushka's sitar. Aamir Khan paid Arijit Singh a visit at his Jiaganj residence in Murshidabad last week.Social media users began speculating about



why the superstar hurried there after videos of Aamir Khan went viral. Aamir can be seen stepping out of the car and waving at the photographers who are positioned nearby in one of the widely shared videos.Arijit Singh announced on social media on January 27 that he would not be accepting any more playback singing gigs. "Hello. Happy New Year to all. I want to thank you all for giving me so much love all these years as listeners. I am happy to announce that I am not going to take any new assignments as a playback vocalist from now on. I am calling it quits. It was a wonderful journey," Arijit wrote on his

Instagram feed. In a private X post, Arijit Singh clarified that he's not leaving music altogether and would devote himself to pursuing a different kind of music to "motivate" himself. Arijit Singh has been the unquestioned king of melody and heartbreak for younger generations for over ten years. Over the years, Arijit has continued to be the composer of choice for everyone from Salman Khan to Shah Rukh Khan, Ranveer Singh to Ranbir Kapoor. His popular songs include "Aaj Phir," "Kabhi Jo Baadal Barse," "Raabta," "Tum Hi Ho," and "Laal Ishq," to mention a few.

Amrita Singh, the first wife of Saif Ali Khan, was never “compelled” to convert to Islam

Mumbai: Married to Kareena Kapoor since 2012, Saif Ali Khan has never held back when talking about his first marriage to Amrita Singh, their split, and how religion is seen in interfaith unions.Fans of all ages are still amazed by Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh's 13-year age difference, their quick romance, and their spontaneous wedding.Saif never forced his first wife, Amrita, to convert to Islam, but his mother, Sharmila Tagore, did so after she married his father, Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi."Dingy was never pressured to become an Islamist or to follow the faith. From the start, it was 'to each his own.' In a 2010 interview, Saif stated, "I adhered to that principle to the letter, even when my children, Sara and Ibrahim, were growing up." Saif further revealed that when Amrita went to the Gurdwara, he used to watch Sara and Ibrahim. "When Dingy went for her reg-

ular prayer visits to the Gurdwara—the temple of the Sikh community—I babysat them and continued doing so on such occasions," he continued.However, I was more concerned about Sara and Ibrahim, who were then under Dingy's care, when we split up. Saif added, "I was worried about their religious identities after divorce, but I trusted her completely and was sure she wouldn't influence them religiously." The couple's brief wedding was detailed by ace designers Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla, who also disclosed how a Sikh priest and a maulvi carried out the ceremonies."We signed as witnesses at their nikaahnama," they revealed in an interview with Namrata Zakaria on her YouTube channel. 'We want to get married now!' they remarked to us one day. Dingy wasn't sure yet; it was Saif. For six or eight months, they had been living together and in love. She was

yes-no, yes-no; he was ready. At the time, we shared a single room. We visited a buddy who lived in a lovely apartment and was single. Naturally, Abu and I called a maulvi and clothed Dingy. "There was also a sardarji pandit there," they added. There was no time, so she prepared herself whatever she saw fit. Thankfully, her mother gave her beautiful jewelry. A bandhgala was worn by Saif. The maulvi then said, "What is your name?" It must begin with the letter A. After we all exchanged glances, the pandit recommended "Aziza." It was an incredible runaway bride moment. Her mother called when she was driving back, but eventually they accepted it.Regarding his career, Saif Ali Khan's next project is the Rahul Dholakia-written and directed Netflix movie Hum Hindustani. The story of India's first election is told in the movie.

Imran Khan claims that his mental “healing” was facilitated by his divorce from Avantika Malik



Mumbai: In a recent interview, actor Imran Khan broke some stereotypes regarding how people view his divorce and was open about his life and profession. Imran acknowledged that although the dynamics between him and his ex-wife were unpleasant, people mistakenly believe that his mental health problems were brought on by the divorce.Imran talked about his marriage and divorce from Avantika

Malik, his childhood sweetheart, in an interview. I came to the realization that my relationship with my boyfriend was unhealthy. The relationship began at a very young age, and at 18 or 19, you don't have nearly enough life experience to know what healthy and unhealthy interpersonal dynamics are. When they were teenagers, Imran and Avantika started dating. On January 16, 2010, the couple got engaged in Karjat. A year later, they were wed in a private civil ceremony at Aamir Khan's Pali Hill residence. In 2013, their daughter Imara was born. According to reports, the pair was living apart in 2019. According to reports, they finalized their divorce the same year. Imran went on to say that his divorce had nothing to do with his struggle with mental health, despite what many people believe. The actor went on, "I realized that this relationship isn't working and that it's not occurring that way, and I have to end it if I want to be the best, healthiest version of myself. This is not someone's fault. The media hasn't featured

me. Since I've been out of the public eye, rumors, gossip, and other forms of speculation just circulate in my absence, which causes confusion and misunderstanding. I believe that many people interpreted my divorce as the event that had the biggest influence on me and that the separation caused a mental health crisis. It's not at all the truth. In actuality, the final few years of my marriage were the hardest for me. The pivotal moment in my own mental health journey that enabled me to truly recover and improve was when I decided to dissolve my marriage. We were out of rhythm, which is why. We couldn't help each other be the finest versions of ourselves. Regarding his career, Imran is finally returning to the film industry after more than ten years. He had a brief appearance in Happy Patel, directed by pal Vir Das, earlier this year. He will now play the lead opposite Bhumi Pednekar in Adhure Hum Adhure Tum. At some point this year, the movie will be available on Netflix.

Ram Gopal Varma Responds to the Social Media Ban for Minors Following the Triple Suicide in Ghaziabad



Mumbai: A heated discussion over digital addiction and renewed efforts to outlaw social media for children in India have been sparked by the suicide of three young sisters in Ghaziabad on February 4.Following the event, filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma commented on the plan to prohibit children under 16 from using social media, claiming that such limitations are ineffective in a world where opportunity is driven by global networks, digital fluency, and information speed. In a letter headlined "BAN THE BANNERS," he argues that limitations, no matter how well-meaning, will harm youth in the long run by denying them access to the very resources that boost their capacity and learning. He began by saying, "The core problem with banning social media to protect children under 16 from so-called offensive content also will handicap them in today's hyper-compet-

itive global information economy."He went on to say, "It's a mistake to believe that social media is merely a pointless diversion since in the modern world, it's the main source of real-time networks, knowledge, and abilities that determine who succeeds. Children in nations where there are no restrictions will always be exposed to state-of-the-art educational materials such as YouTube tutorials, Reddit discussions, TikTok explainers, and international forums that teach languages, coding, entrepreneurship, science, and current affairs more quickly and interestingly than traditional classrooms." Children who stay connected to fast-moving information streams and those who are excluded by policy are becoming increasingly separated, according to Varma.He wrote: "There will be a glaring disparity in opportunities, breaking news, and various viewpoints that children in constrained nations only get later, if at all, through more slower and curated means. In a non-banned country, a 14-year-old develops an intuitive mastery of information flows, creates online communities, tries out ideas, and stays ahead of a counterpart in a banning country, such as Australia, where the children will miss the early digital social capital, the discoveries, and the informal education that will eventually compound into improved educational outcomes, competitive career edges, and creative thinking." "The 'pro-

tection" justification for banning sounds admirable, but it ignores how the modern world actually functions," he said, acknowledging the "protective rationale" but insisting it misunderstands the reality of a linked world. Success on a personal and national level now depends heavily on the timeliness of information. Blocking access won't make hazards go away; it just transfers the information advantage to kids in other places, escalating the very disparities that governments say they care about. Although children will eventually come into contact with the outside world, those who are not given early, directed exposure run the danger of being less equipped, less flexible, and less knowledgeable than those who are." "These prohibitions don't protect children at a time when knowledge is shared online at an exponential rate; instead, they will produce a generation of digital latecomers who will fall fundamentally behind in the global competition for opportunities, ideas, and skills. The nations that maintain free access are essentially providing their young people with a significant advantage. The systemic cost of information deprivation in a competitive environment is far greater than the "offensive content" rationale, even though it may be valid in certain situations. The director went on to say, "This should be a serious caution about sacrificing long-term capability for temporary safety measures.

Usha Uthup is not upset about the Rambha Ho repeat in Dhurandhar

Mumbai: Before repeating her classic song Rambha Ho, singer Usha Uthup had no qualms about the Dhurandhar filmmakers not asking her for permission. Rather, she expresses her happiness at the song's resurgence and claims she is not offended that another person contributed their voice to the updated version.Usha Uthup disclosed in an interview with Radio Nasha that she received a link to the Dhurandhar rehashed version of Rambha Ho. She acknowledged that the new interpretation of her classic song had pleasantly surprised her, and that the remake had given the music a new lease on life. "Somebody sent me the link. So I said, 'Wow! What is this! It's fabulous.' I'm not one of those people who feels bad somebody else sang this. I'm very happy," she said. "It's incredible that it returned with such a bang." Usha continued. This supports my belief that the song transcends the singer, which I have held throughout my life. God has my sincere gratitude. My God, I've been singing Rambha Ho in my gigs for so long, and it's been 40 years since the song's premiere. However, it's truly incredible that it returned with such a bang. Naturally, Madhuanti



has also performed it with grace. She did a great job singing it.The singer added that she was not contacted by the producers to obtain her OK for the reworked version. Usha had previously commended Madhubanti in an interview, stating, "Madhubanti has done a fabulous job." At Kolkata's Trincas nightclub, we also performed a reel together, which was fantastic. The song, in my opinion, is far more significant than the performer. That's where whoever sings "Rambha Ho" will shine. She revealed that she



has been singing Rambha Ho at almost every performance for years, and the Dhurandhar version has given the song new life and increased its appeal once more. Who ever thought, really? In any event, I have to sing Rambha Ho at every performance I do. However, it now has a new force, and we are all grateful to Dhurandhar for its widespread popularity. I have no idea how many millions of hits Ramba Ho receives every second on what Gen-Z refers to as Instagram. "It's incredible," the vocalist declared.

How Ranveer Singh Handles “Pretty Crazy” Situations in Life



New Delhi: Right now, Ranveer Singh is feeling really successful. The actor is currently preparing for the release of its second sequel, which is scheduled to hit theaters on March 19, after his most recent release, Dhurandhar, did remarkably well at the box office.In an interview with a news outlet midway through his popularity, Ranveer talked candidly about how he handles life when it gets "pretty crazy." Actor said, "My life can get pretty crazy at times, and I crave serenity, moments of calm and stillness. The kind of silence where I can hear myself again, feel reconnected with my passions, and see the stress melt away." He added, "For me, Abu Dhabi is that special place. It's where I slow down, be it on a walk through the Al Ain Oasis or just lounging poolside at Saadiyat Beach Club. It's the place that always lets me find my pace, and that's something I really cherish."

Ranveer, who is well-known for his powerful on-screen presence, claimed that travel makes him more introspective and silent. He revealed that his interest in other cultures and individuals has been greatly influenced by his academic background."My curiosity, thirst for information, and appetite for exploration become intense," he remarked. My desire to learn about culture is unquenchable. In college, I studied culture and communication. I have a genuine enthusiasm for studying and learning about culture. The actor went on to discuss the impact that travel had on him, saying, "I think travel humbles you; it makes you realise how vast the world is and how small your bubble can be - a feeling that can be quite liberating." "It really depends on my mood," Ranveer remarked when asked if he has ever made impulsive decisions while traveling. I prefer to make plans ahead of time. At other times, I follow the crowd.Sanjay Dutt, R Madhavan, Arjun Rampal, and Akshaye Khanna are among the talented ensemble cast members of Dhurandhar, which was released on December 5, 2025.

Sonam Wangchuk’s detention is being reconsidered by the Supreme Court

New Delhi, Feb 09: Concerned over Sonam Wangchuk’s declining health, the Supreme Court once again requested that the Central government reevaluate his detention. The Center informed the Court during the hearing that Wangchuk is presently undergoing treatment at AIIMS Jaipur, which it asserted is superior to the medical care offered in Ladakh. The bench reminded the government that this is a habeas corpus case, which cannot be delayed for an extended period of time, after the Center requested a one-week adjournment, citing Solicitor General KM Nataraj’s involvement in another matter. The issue is now scheduled for Wednesday. Justice Aravind Kumar questioned the Center about any developments toward Wangchuk’s release on medical grounds. But according to the Additional Solicitor General, Wangchuk was in good health. Wangchuk’s attorney responded by telling the court that his health was still not good. Two days after violent protests in Ladakh demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status, Wangchuk was arrested on September 26 of last year. Ninety people were hurt and four individuals were killed in the riots. He was charged by the authorities with inciting the violence. The Supreme Court had previously requested that the Center investigate whether it may reconsider Wangchuk’s incarceration in light of his condition. His medical report was deemed unsatisfactory



by the bench of Justices Kumar and Varale, who also directed ASG Nataraj to ask the government for explicit guidance on the subject. On February 3, Wangchuk was arrested for inciting people in a border area where regional sensitivity is implicated, the Center and the Union Territory of Ladakh administration informed the Supreme Court. When he ordered Wangchuk’s imprisonment under the National Security Act (NSA), Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told a bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and

PB Varale that all procedural protections had been followed. Contending that Wangchuk has been given fair treatment, Mehta said all the provisions of the NSA have been scrupulously complied with. Wangchuk attempted to mobilize Gen Z for protests in Bangladesh and Nepal, according to the Center. According to Mehta, Wangchuk even alluded to the movement reminiscent of the Arab Spring, which has resulted in the overthrow of numerous administrations in Arab nations.

PSG defeats Marseille to reclaim the top spot in Ligue 1

New Delhi: Paris Saint-Germain defeated arch rivals Marseille 5-0 on Sunday at the Parc des Princes, regaining their top status in Ligue 1. Ousmane Dembele scored twice in the rout. PSG made a clear statement of intent heading into the season’s pivotal months when Dembele opened the scoring after just 12 minutes and added a second goal before half-time. After a 1-0 loss at the Velodrome in September, PSG earned their largest-ever margin of victory over Marseille, thanks to goals from replacements Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Lee Kang-in after Facundo Medina’s own goal put them ahead 3-0. “It was nearly flawless. Luis Enrique, the coach of PSG, praised Dembele for his “incredible” performance and stated, “We made history.” He’s a different kind of player, I stated from the first day he came. Due to injuries, he has had difficulty returning to his previous level this season. He is truly unique. Though they are still under pressure from unexpected rivals Lens, who momentarily took the lead on Saturday and are currently only two points behind, PSG has already won seven straight league games. We’re a very reliable team, so it’s not a message we’re trying to convey,” Luis Enrique continued. As we approach the season’s peak, we’re staying on course from the previous year, and this outcome is significant for our confidence.” PSG midfielder Vitinha only received a yellow card for a strong, studs-up attack on captain Leonardo Balerdi in the first few minutes, which may have angered Marseille. VAR did not order referee Willy Delajod to review the incident, despite the severity of the tackle. But after that, it was an outstanding performance deserving of the European champs. Moments later, PSG took the lead when Nuno Mendes was released by Desire Doue with a wonderful ball down the left. The Portuguese wing-back then squared for Dembele to sneak past Jeffrey de Lange, the goalkeeper for Marseille.

A tobacco baron’s son drives a Lamborghini on a spree, 6 injured



New Delhi, Feb 09: Six people were hurt when a Lamborghini, purportedly driven by the son of a tobacco merchant, lost control and collided with a motorcycle and an autorickshaw before crashing onto the pavement in Kanpur on Sunday at midday. According to reports, the driver was Shivam Mishra, the son of millionaire businessman KK Mishra. Several cars were struck by the fancy sports car as it abruptly swerved while it was cruising close to the Ring Wala area, according to witnesses. Since then, the family has stated that Shivam has a medical issue and lost control while driving due to a seizure. A family member informed authorities that

“he has been experiencing these episodes for the past six months.” DCP (Central) Atul Kumar Srivastava told reporters that the event happened at approximately 3:15 p.m. The luxury car, allegedly driven by Shivam Mishra, the son of industrialist K K Mishra, drove out of control and crashed into multiple vehicles and pedestrians standing by the side of the road, causing panic in the vicinity of Rev-3 Mall,” he continued. Witnesses at the site reported that the speeding vehicle struck an autorickshaw first, then a Royal Enfield bike in a park. The bike’s rider was thrown almost ten feet into the air when the automobile struck it. After mounting the motorcycle’s front wheel

and dragging it a distance, the automobile struck an electric post and stopped. After the collision, irate residents hurried to the scene and encircled the luxury vehicle to prevent the driver from leaving. Additionally, witnesses claim that private bouncers arrived at the scene and attempted to save the driver inside the Lamborghini. “I’ve heard that the driver of the luxury car was pulled by several of the bouncers who broke the glass. He was taken away in another vehicle. They’ve transported the Lamborghini to the police station. According to an eyewitness, the incident injured maybe four or five persons. After the car was hauled to the Gwalitoli police station, where it attracted sizable throngs of observers, authorities faced an additional obstacle. In order to protect the well-known family from criticism, officers eventually covered the automobile with a tarp. According to DCP (Central) Atul Srivastava, an inquiry is being conducted to determine the crash’s circumstances and the medical claims.

Sourav Ganguly Attacks Pakistan for Boycotting India in the T20 World Cup

New Delhi: Sourav Ganguly, the president of the BCCI and a former captain of India, has voiced his surprise at Pakistan’s decision to skip their highly anticipated match against India in Colombo on February 15. Former Indian Captain Sourav Ganguly discussed his thoughts on Pakistan’s decision to skip its match against India in the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026 with reporters on Sunday. “Backing out of a World Cup for what?” he asked. In any event, they are performing in Sri Lanka. I’m shocked that Pakistan has backed out. Every point matters in a World Cup. In support of Bangladesh’s decision to skip the tournament in India, Pakistan had previously declared that it will boycott their match against India. India T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav had stated before the competition began that his squad was ready to play their highly awaited World Cup match against bitter rivals Pakistan, which is set for February 15 in Colombo. Ahead of India’s Group A match against Pakistan on February 15 at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo, Suryakumar emphasized that the country’s position has not changed during the Captains’ Media Briefing in Colombo on Thursday. “We have a clear plan: we’ll play. We’ve booked our flight and are leaving. They may see

for themselves, rest. According to ICC, Suryakumar stated, “I have no control over their decision.” “We played Pakistan in the Asia Cup (2025) at a neutral location. We are prepared to travel to Colombo. We’ve been informed that our game is on February 15th. India will play their first group match against the USA on February 7 and their second match on February 12 at the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026, which is set to take place from February 7 to March 8. The USA, Namibia, the Netherlands, and bitter adversary Pakistan are all in Group A, along with the reigning champions, Team India. Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Harshit Rana, Varun Chakaravathy, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, and Rinku Singh are the members of the Indian team for the ICC T20 World Cup 2026. Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (wicketkeeper), Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wicketkeeper), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan, Usman Tariq, and Salman Ali Agha (captain) are the members of Pakistan’s squad for the ICC T20 World Cup 2026.

Today, Mamata Banerjee is in the Supreme Court 2.0 regarding SIR

New Delhi, Feb 09: The Election Commission’s response to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s plea contesting West Bengal’s special intense revision (SIR) is scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court on Monday. In a historic clash last week, Chief Minister Banerjee pleaded with the Supreme Court to “save democracy” while voicing her complaints against the Election Commission in a passionate, high-pitched statement. In the top court, Banerjee made broad accusations against the election commission, claiming that 1.36 crore voters on the logical discrepancy list were at risk of being removed due to systematic mistakes such as “misspellings in surnames” or changes in daughters’ residences after marriage. She also brought up the matter of the 8,300 micro-observers that the ECI had deployed throughout the state, accusing them of erasing voter names without authorization and in violation of the Constitution. The chief minister of West Bengal made a plea to the highest court, arguing that the upcoming assembly elections in the state should be held using the voter list from 2025 rather than the one created following SIR, since thousands of eligible voters could be left off of it. She urged the poll authority should post the names of 1.4 crore contested voter names online in a searchable format, claiming that just the state of West Bengal is being targeted. She also made an appeal to the highest court, arguing that in circumstances of discrepancy, the Election Commission ought to be requested to consider the Aadhaar Card as sufficient identification. Additionally, she has requested a hold on the “secret mass deletions” of voters through bulk



Form-7 applications. The top court sent out a notice regarding her plea and asked the EC to respond, which it will do today. She was asked to permit her attorney, Shyam Diwan, to plead on her side by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant at the same time. The top court is scheduled to hear another Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by Sanatani Sagsad, which seeks security for EC personnel who say they are being “made to fear for their lives whilst discharging their democratic obligation.” This could pose some difficult questions for the Mamata Banerjee administration today. Since the Central government is also a party to the petition, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta had asked the highest court to hear it on Monday along with Mamata Banerjee’s appeal. Additionally, he cited the Election Commission’s previous affidavits, in which it told the Supreme Court that its officials conducting the SIR of West Bengal’s electoral rolls are seriously threatened with harm, forcing some to resign from their positions following

violent incidents at hearing locations. The EC also accused Mamata Banerjee of making “provocative speeches” against its personnel in one of its affidavits. Citing several instances of physical attacks and vandalism against election officials around the state, the Election Commission had requested the court in its most recent affidavit dated January 28 to permit sessions to be moved from Panchayat Bhawans to safer venues. They informed the court of violent attacks that had occurred at West Bengal’s Itahar, Farakka, and Chakukia SIR hearing locations. The top court will hear the Election Commission’s charges regarding rampant disenfranchisement in West Bengal today, in addition to the poll body’s rebuttal to Mamata Banerjee’s claims from SIR. This could provide some difficult problems for the Mamata administration. The Election Commission must simultaneously persuade the court that the 1.4 crore persons who are subject to deletion will not be unjustly left off of the SIR voter list.

Dhakshineswar Suresh, India’s New Davis Cup Hero

New Delhi: In the most stressful environments, legends are created. Dhakshineswar Suresh of India proved the adage correct on Sunday, leading his country to a historic 3-2 victory over the Netherlands in the Davis Cup. Despite being ranked as low as 465 in the world, Suresh, who is known to his colleagues and the tennis community as “DK,” suddenly became a remarkable player on the court and the undeniable beating heart of Indian tennis. The 25-year-old, who was just playing in his second Davis Cup match, pulled off an incredible three-win haul, winning both of his singles rubbers and teaming up with Yuki Bhambri to win the doubles—a rare accomplishment in Indian Davis Cup history. Suresh, who is 6 feet 5 inches tall, has a ruggedness on the court that is uncommon in Indian singles history. His serve and aggressive baseline strokes are the two main weapons that make up his game. In one of the biggest surprises by an Indian player in recent memory, Suresh startled the tennis world in December 2023 when he defeated former World No. 1 Daniil Medvedev in the World Tennis League in Bengaluru. Suresh was born in Madurai,

Tamil Nadu, and his height permits steep angles, which, once he settles into a rhythm, make his initial serve all but unreturnable. Instead of playing “touch and volley,” as is customary in India, DK dictates points with a strong forehand in a contemporary, power-oriented style. Suresh had a unique journey to the Davis Cup. In the United States, at Wake Forest University, he honed his skills. The “college tennis” system gave him the setting that helped him develop extraordinary poise when competing in Davis Cup team competitions. He prepared his physique for the demands of the professional tour and was a steady top performer in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), garnering him All-American honors. Dhakshineswar’s emotional fortitude is what makes him unique. Suresh thrives under the spotlight, however many players find it difficult to make the switch from the ITF/Challenger circuit to the international arena. His characteristic is his ability to keep up a high first-serve percentage even when he is tired. These days, Dhakshineswar Suresh is more than simply a “prospect”; he is leading India into a new era.

Inter Milan leads Serie A by eight points thanks to Federico Dimarco



New Delhi: Pierre Kalulu scored late in extra time to save Juventus from a 2-2 draw with Lazio, while Federico Dimarco contributed three assists as Inter Milan crushed Sassuolo 5-0 on Sunday to extend their undefeated Serie A record to 12 games. As Inter pulled eight points clear of city rivals AC Milan, Dimarco, who now has nine assists for the season, also struck the woodwork and cleared a likely goal off the line. However, he declared that he would not allow his nice figure to overshadow his head. “I don’t think of myself as anyone. “In football, you’re nothing when things go wrong, but you’re a phenomenon when things go right,” Dimarco stated. I don’t worry about anything else and continue working as I know how. Of those 12 games without a loss, Inter has won 11 and drew one. Forwards Marcus Thuram, Lautaro Martinez, and Luis Henrique all scored, as did center-backs Yann Bisseck

and Manuel Akanji. As soon as he got back to clear a Canadian Ismael Kone shot off the line in the opening minute, Dimarco was in the middle of things. German center-back Bisseck headed home Dimarco’s 11th-minute corner at the back post to give Inter the lead ten minutes later. On minute eighteen, Dimarco nearly scored on his own, but his free kick bounced off the crossbar. Thuram, a forward for France, flicked the ball home right-footed at the near post after he crossed from the left once more. When Norwegian midfielder Kristian Thorstvedt bundled home from close range four minutes from halftime, Sassuolo believed they had tied the score, but a VAR review deemed it offside. Within ten minutes of the restart, Argentina’s Martinez scored from near the penalty spot after a long throw into the box, giving Inter the victory. The club captain now shares third place on Inter’s all-time leading scorer list as a result. Sassuolo’s slim prospects of winning the game were dashed when Nemanja Matic, a former midfielder for Chelsea and Manchester United, was sent off for something he said to the referee. Henrique scored the fifth with a deft control and a minute from time after Thuram struck the post.

SC postpones hearing in Meta-WhatsApp privacy policy issue until February 23

New Delhi, Feb 09: Delhi, On Monday, the Supreme Court postponed until February 23 the appeals of WhatsApp and Meta Platforms Inc. against a ₹213.14 crore fine imposed by the Competition Commission of India for their privacy policies. A bench made up of Justices Joydalya Bagchi, N V Anjaria, and Chief Justice of India Surya Kant was informed that senior attorney Kapil Sibal was ill and that the hearing should be postponed. The bench stated that on February 23, it will consider the arguments in order to issue an interim injunction. The decision allowed the inclusion of a litigant, who was represented by prominent advocate Arvind Datar, as a party to the case. The bench made strong observations against Meta Platforms Inc. and WhatsApp on February 3, stating that they could not “play with the right to privacy of citizens in the name of data sharing” and accusing them of stealing customer private infor-

mation and establishing a monopoly in the market. Referring to “silent customers” who were unorganized, reliant on technology, and ignorant of the consequences of data-sharing rules, the bench denounced WhatsApp’s privacy policy and declared, “We will not allow the rights of any citizen of this country to be damaged.” The top court was considering the two tech giants’ petitions against a CCI ruling that fined them ₹213.14 crore over their privacy policies. A portion of a CCI judgment that prohibited WhatsApp from exchanging data with Meta Platforms Inc. for advertising reasons for five years was overturned by the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal on November 4, 2025, but the ₹213-crore fine was kept in place. Subsequently, the NCLAT explained that its ruling on privacy and consent protections in the WhatsApp case also covers the gathering and sharing of user data



for non-WhatsApp uses, such as advertising and non-advertising. In addition to ordering that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology be added as a party to the appeals of the two corporations, the top court stated that it would issue an interim order on February 9. The CCI filed a cross-appeal against the bench, arguing that the NCLAT verdict permitted WhatsApp and Meta to continue exchanging user data for advertising.

Cops clear the air over ‘whistle ban’ at T20 WC match in Chepauk

Cops Deny Chepauk Whistle Ban

Chennai: The debut of the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2026 in Chennai on Sunday should have been headlined by the clash between New Zealand and Afghanistan. Instead, social media was set ablaze by a different kind of noise: a rumored ban on whistles at the iconic MA Chidambaram Stadium (Chepauk). What started as a spectator grievance quickly spiraled into a political debate. The humble whistle, long a staple of Chennai’s “Yellow Brigade” fan culture, has recently taken on a new weight as the official election symbol of actor-turned-politician Vijay’s TVK party. Conflicting Reports from the Stands As rumors of a crackdown spread, the narrative on the ground was far from uniform. Some fans reported a seamless entry, while others claimed security was playing favorites or acting on unspoken orders.



The Claims of Confiscation: One spectator, N. Raman, reported witnessing a constable seize a whistle from an elderly fan near Gate 14, though his young son was permitted to keep his. The Counter-Experience: Conversely, a fan named Aadithya entering through Gate 11 reported no restrictions or searches focused on whistles. The Vendors’ View: Hawkers on Wallajah Road, the lifeblood of stadium merchandise,

confirmed that police had not interfered with their sales. According to them, plenty of fans walked into the venue with newly purchased whistles in hand. Official Stance: Business as Usual In response to the growing social media storm, both the Chennai City Police and the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) issued firm denials. Police sources clarified that no specific directive was

issued regarding whistles. Security checks were strictly limited to standard ICC protocols, which include the prohibition of political flags, banners, and provocative signage. The official spectator guidelines hosted by BookMyShow also remained silent on whistles, further backing the claim that no formal ban existed. The Political Undercurrent The sensitivity surrounding the whistle highlights the intersection of sport and politics in Tamil Nadu. With the 2026 political landscape shifting, any perceived restriction on a symbol—even in a sporting context—becomes a lightning rod for controversy. While the “whistle pods” (the sound of the whistle) continued to echo through the stands for many, the confusion at the gates served as a reminder of how easily a sporting event can be swept up in a wider political narrative.

Real Madrid edge Valencia to stay on Barca’s tail, Atletico slump

Madrid Keep Pace; Atletico Falter

Valencia: Real Madrid kept their La Liga title charge alive on Sunday, securing a gritty 2-0 victory over Valencia at Mestalla. The win moves Alvaro Arbeloa’s side within one point of leaders Barcelona, who had extended their advantage with a win over Mallorca a day earlier. Mbappe Leads the Charge Despite missing the suspended Vinicius Junior and the injured Jude Bellingham, Kylian Mbappe continued his stellar form, netting his 23rd league goal of the season. After a scoreless first half where academy graduate David Jimenez was denied by Valencia keeper Stole Dimitrievski, Madrid finally broke the deadlock midway through the second



period. Full-back Alvaro Carreras provided the spark, cutting in from the left to fire a right-footed shot inside the near post. While Valencia’s Lucas Beltran nearly equalized—hitting the woodwork on the stretch—Madrid put the game to bed in stoppage time. Brahim Diaz set up Mbappe for a sim-

ple finish, cementing his status as the league’s top scorer. “Cristiano Ronaldo seemed impossible to equal, but Kylian is on a good path,” coach Arbeloa said after the match. “If anyone can reach those heights, it’s him.” The match also saw the return of Trent Alexander-Arnold, who featured as a second-half substi-

tute following an injury layoff. Meanwhile, Valencia remains in crisis, sitting 17th and just one point above the relegation zone. Betis Stun Atletico In Madrid, Atletico Madrid’s title hopes took a massive blow as they fell 1-0 to Real Betis. Just three days after Diego Simeone’s men thrashed Betis 5-0 in the Copa del Rey, the Andalusian side found their revenge. Antony scored the only goal of the match in the 28th minute, beating Jan Oblak at the near post. Atletico thought they had equalized late through a Diego Llorente own goal, but it was ruled out after Antoine Griezmann was caught offside. The defeat leaves Atletico 13 points adrift of Barcelona.

Pizza maker, physical education teacher, cab driver in Italian mix



Kolkata: THE Eden Gardens was teeming with the presence of the top brass of the Italian Cricket Federation (FCRI) on Sunday. The federation’s president, vice-president and CEO were set to watch their country’s debut at the T20 World Cup on Monday. The occasion isn’t lost on them so they have flown down three Italian journalists from some of their bigger publications to send cricket-related dispatches back home to ensure news of their achievements reaches the football-mad public in Italy. Cricket is not new to Italy. In the late

1800s, when AC Milan was founded, cricket had a pride of place at the club but not anymore. Italian forward, Christian Veiiri grew up in Australia and had a fling for cricket. Now, there are no professional players in Italy. In fact, several players have had to pause their day jobs to represent the country. Take the case of Justin Mosca, who teaches physical education at a school in Sydney, and his brother Anthony, who teaches carpentry at a juvenile centre there. Crishan Kalugamage, who moved from Sri Lanka to Italy as a teenager, works

as a pizza-maker. Zain Ali, whose doctor dad left Pakistan, is a mechanical engineer. Born in Punjab, Jaspreet Singh, who drove Uber in the UK and trains in Birmingham, has always had to juggle his day job to keep the fire burning. Some players feature in domestic cricket across England, South Africa and Australia. That said, the Italian National Olympic Committee has now stepped in with the inclusion of cricket in the Olympics. “I think they are heading down that path, but still, years away,” Justin said. “Italy Cricket, while it’s been around for a long time, is in its infancy stages of understanding how much goes into this sort of work. I think they need to build the structure, and probably need more staff. So it’s in the process, but in terms of becoming a professional sport and making a living out of it, I think that’s still something they have to work through.”

Al-Nassr hopeful Ronaldo will return for Asian Champions League Two

Riyadh: Cristiano Ronaldo is yet to win a major trophy since arriving in Saudi Arabia, and Al-Nassr will be hoping the 41-year-old Portuguese star returns to action on Wednesday to help the Riyadh club move closer to silverware. Al-Nassr takes on Arkadag of Turkmenistan with a place in the quarterfinals of the Asian Champions League Two on the line. Ronaldo hasn’t played any part in Al-Nassr’s most recent two games in the Saudi Pro League amid reports he was unhappy with the way the club is being funded, particularly after watching rival Al-Hilal sign Karim Benzema in last month’s transfer window. Al-Nassr, Al-Hilal, Al-Ittihad and Al-Ahli are all majority owned by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund. In a statement, the SPL outlined that no player is bigger than the club or the league. “The Saudi Pro

It’s just the beginning; I played some different tennis in these matches: Dhakshineswar

Bengaluru: India’s newest Davis Cup hero Dhakshineswar Suresh says his dream run for the country is “just the beginning” as he prepares to step into full-fledged competition on the ATP Tour after completing his studies at a US university. Pursuing communication studies at the Wake Forest University, the 25-year-old will complete his degree in May this year. In just two ties since making his debut in September 2025, Dhakshineswar boasts an impressive 4-0 record, with three of those wins coming against the Netherlands in Bengaluru last weekend. “It’s a long way to go. It’s just the beginning,” said Dhakshineswar, who matched Leander Paes’ feat of winning three matches in a single tie back in 2004 against Japan. Following Dhakshineswar’s superlative show, India edged the Netherlands 3-2 to progress to the second round of the Davis Cup Qualifiers, where they will meet Korea in September. “I’ll go back to the US to finish my studies, then come down in May and figure out my schedule. Once that’s sorted, I’ll start getting into the Tour and prepare for the next Davis Cup,” he said.

On Dhakshineswar’s remarkable record, captain Rohit Rajpal said, “There aren’t many players who go 4-0 in Davis Cup rubbers, especially against



quality opponents. He keeps coming up with big serves and big forehands. I hope he keeps enjoying his tennis and keeps performing.” Dhakshineswar said representing India had brought out a different side of his game. “It’s a different feeling when you’re playing for your country. You’re not just playing for yourself, you’re playing for the whole nation. I played some different tennis in these matches and I’m really proud of that,” he said. The tall Chennai-born player, who played marathon singles and doubles matches over two days, credited the support staff and team environment for his recovery and consistency. “The physios and everyone took care of me really well. Team chemistry on and off the court makes a huge difference. Everyone trusting me helps me play good tennis,” he added. Rajpal also lauded an injured Sumit Nagal for leading the team de-

spite being far from full fitness. “Sumit was not even 50 per cent fit. He had a grade two tear in his hip and we were working day and night with the physios. But he fought like a tiger and led the team like an India number one should.” Rajpal singled out the contribution of the support staff, especially the physios, and said the tie underlined India’s growing depth. “With these guys, a strong doubles team and the bench strength we now have, India is a tough team to beat. If we play to our potential, we can take on anybody in the world,” he said. Nagal, who lost both his singles matches after a three-week injury layoff, admitted it was a tough week but felt encouraged by his fight. “It was disappointing to get injured before such an important tie, but to come out and compete after not playing or practising was not easy. The doubles point was crucial and DK played amazing tennis,” he said, adding that he would resume preparations in Chennai. Looking ahead to the next tie against Korea, Rajpal said planning would begin after the celebrations. “We’ll start strategising tomorrow, where they play us, on what surface. I stay in constant touch with the players. Team selection and planning is a collective process,” he said.

Rugby Dad, Cricket Sons: Italy’s Manenti Family Stars

Kolkata: While most Australian families spend their weekends divided between sports, the Manenti family has managed to conquer two entirely different arenas on a global scale. In a historic moment at Eden Gardens, brothers Benjamin and Harry Manenti took the field for Italy’s T20 World Cup debut against Scotland, marking a transition from the rugby pitches of Sydney to the pinnacle of international cricket. A Tale of Two Balls The Manenti household was built on elite sport. Their father, John Manenti, is a renowned rugby union coach currently leading the San Diego Legion in Major League Rugby. Having coached the Australian Sevens team to three Olympics, John’s legacy was firmly oval-shaped. We probably still think we’re better at rugby than we are at cricket,” Benjamin jokes. Growing up, the brothers played rugby in the winter and cricket in the summer. While rugby was a passion, cricket became their destiny—not necessarily by



design, but by a series of opportunities that led them back to their Italian heritage. Reconnecting with Heritage The brothers qualify for Italy through their grandparents, who migrated to North Queensland after World War II. For Benjamin and Harry, wearing the Italian colors is more than just a career move; it is a tribute to their ancestors. The path to the national team wasn’t immediate. Benjamin, a standout for the Sydney Sixers, first mentioned his heritage during a TV interview, which caught the attention of the Italian Cricket Federation. While Benja-

min was tied up with professional commitments in South Australia, Harry and fellow teammates Justin and Anthony Mosca paved the way, debuting in 2022. By 2023, the brothers finally united under the Italian flag, fueling a successful qualification campaign for the 2026 T20 World Cup. Learning from Legends Despite playing for Italy, the brothers remain fixtures in the Australian domestic circuit—Benjamin with the Sixers and Harry with the Adelaide Strikers. This has allowed them to seek advice from some of the world’s best. Before heading to India, Benjamin picked the

brain of Steve Smith on subcontinental conditions. “I’ve spoken to Steve Smith a fair bit about the way he goes about it over here,” Benjamin says. While he admits he can’t quite replicate the “freakish” hitting of teammate Travis Head, the insight from Australia’s elite has been invaluable. As Italy makes its mark on the world stage, the Manentis aren’t just playing for a trophy—they are building a support base for Italians worldwide. From the rugby stands to the cricket boundary, the Manenti name is now synonymous with Italian sporting pride.