

Monthly Current Affairs

February 2026



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Governance and Policy

Centre Withdraws 18% Excise Duty on Unmanufactured Tobacco

What's the News?

- The **Union Government** has withdrawn the **18% Central Excise duty** on unmanufactured tobacco that was imposed on December 31, 2025, through a fresh notification issued on February 1, 2026.
- **Tobacco traders** in Karnataka, who had boycotted auction platforms since January 24 to protest the levy, have announced their return to auctions from February 5.
- The decision follows a delegation of tobacco farmers from **Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka** led by **Tobacco Board Chairman Yashwant Kumar Chidipothu** and **BJP MP D. Purandeshwari** meeting Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** to express concerns over the tax burden.

Duty Structure and Relief

- **Nil Excise Duty:** Applies to unmanufactured tobacco or tobacco refuse **not bearing a brand name and not packed for retail sale**.
- **Continued 18% Duty:** Applies to all other forms of unmanufactured tobacco that are **branded or packed for retail sale**.
- This creates a clear bifurcation protecting **small farmers and unorganised sector traders** while ensuring **branded manufacturers** remain taxed.

Impact on Tobacco Sector

- **Farmers' Relief:** The withdrawal prevents a potential dip in tobacco prices and protects farmer incomes. Over **50% of Karnataka's 2025-26 tobacco crop** (authorised crop size: **100 million kg**, expected yield: **85 million kg**) remains unsold.
- **Trade Resumption:** Prior to the boycott, approximately **41 million kg (45%)** had been sold at auction platforms at an average price of **₹289-290 per kg**, up from last year's **₹267 per kg**.
- **Export Advantage:** About **80% of Karnataka's tobacco** is exported to foreign cigarette manufacturers; the exemption supports export competitiveness.
- **Stock Market Impact:** Major tobacco companies like **ITC** and **Godfrey Phillips** are unlikely to be affected as they deal in **branded, retail-packed products** that continue to attract 18% excise duty.

Additional Info

- **Constitutional & Tax Framework:**
 - **Article 265:** No tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law – the excise duty was imposed via notification under Central Excise law.
 - **GST on Tobacco:** Simultaneously increased from **28% to 40%** for tobacco products classified as "sin goods" under the GST regime.
 - **Customs Duty Alignment:** Import of unbranded, non-retail unmanufactured tobacco will also see reduced **Countervailing**

Duty (CVD) equivalent to the withdrawn excise rate.

- **Institutional Context:**
 - **Tobacco Board:** Statutory body under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** responsible for regulating tobacco cultivation and marketing.
 - **Auction System:** Tobacco in Karnataka is sold through authorised auction platforms monitored by the Tobacco Board.
- **Sin Tax Rationale:** While the government maintains high taxation on tobacco as a **demerit good** to discourage consumption, the specific levy on raw unmanufactured tobacco was seen as adversely affecting farmer livelihoods without significantly advancing public health objectives.

India Notifies New Baggage Rules 2026 to Modernize Customs Procedures

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Finance** has notified the **Baggage Rules, 2026**, replacing the decade-old **Baggage Rules, 2016**.
- The new rules significantly increase the **duty-free allowance** for international travelers arriving in India by air or sea.
- Key objectives include aligning customs procedures with modern travel patterns, enhancing **transparency**, and facilitating smoother passenger clearance through **digitalization**.
- The revised framework came into effect on **February 2, 2026**.

Enhanced Duty-Free Allowances

- **General Limit Hike:** The duty-free limit for **Indian residents, tourists of Indian origin, and foreigners with valid non-tourist visas** has been raised from **₹50,000 to ₹75,000**.
- **Foreign Tourists:** The allowance for tourists of foreign origin has been increased to **₹25,000** (previously ₹15,000).
- **Crew Members:** A duty-free cap of **₹2,500** has been set for airline and vessel crew members for personal items like chocolates or cosmetics.
- **Land Borders:** No general duty-free allowance is available for passengers entering India through land borders, regardless of nationality.

Rationalized Jewellery & Electronics Rules

- **Weight-Based Jewellery Allowance:** Outdated value caps (previously ₹1 lakh for women and ₹50,000 for men) have been removed. The allowance is now based purely on weight for those residing abroad for over one year:
 - **Female Passengers:** Up to **40 grams** of gold/precious metal jewellery.
 - **Other Passengers:** Up to **20 grams**.

- **Laptop Exemption:** Passengers aged **18 years and above** are permitted to import **one laptop or notebook** fully duty-free, separate from the ₹75,000 general cap.
- **Pets:** For the first time, clearer duty-free provisions for importing **pets** have been incorporated into the formal rules, subject to animal import regulations.

Modernization & Digitalization

- **Digital Declarations:** The **Customs Baggage (Declaration and Processing) Regulations, 2026** enable passengers to file **electronic advance declarations** via apps or portals, generating a **QR code** for faster airport clearance.
- **Transfer of Residence (ToR):** Benefits for returning Indians have been rationalized into a single list with higher value caps based on the duration of stay abroad:
 - **1 to 2 years:** Up to ₹3 lakh.
 - **Above 2 years:** Up to ₹7.5 lakh.
- **Flat Customs Duty:** Starting **April 1, 2026**, a flat **10% customs duty** (plus surcharges) will apply to dutiable goods in bona fide baggage that exceed the free allowance, replacing the previous higher/variable rates.

NSO to Conduct Nationwide Migration Survey (2026–27)

What's the News?

- The **National Statistical Office (NSO)**, under the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)**, has announced a year-long nationwide **Survey on Migration** to be conducted from **July 2026 to June 2027**.
- This will be India's most comprehensive migration-specific study in nearly two decades, filling a critical data gap since the last dedicated **National Sample Survey (NSS)** on migration in 2007–08.
- The survey aims to provide updated, granular data on internal mobility to help the government design evidence-based policies for **urban planning, labour welfare, and social security**.

Purpose of the Survey

- **Capture Diverse Patterns:** The survey will document various forms of movement, including **rural-urban, inter-state, seasonal, and return migration** (which gained prominence post-pandemic).
- **Update Outdated Data:** Current estimates largely rely on the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21**, which lacks the depth required for specialized migration policy.
- **Improved Metrics:**
 - **Short-term Migrants:** The definition has been revised to include anyone staying away from their **Usual Place of Residence (UPR)** for **15 days to 6 months** (previously 1 to 6 months).
 - **Focus on Individuals:** Unlike previous rounds that focused on households, this survey will track **individual migrants** to better reflect circular and labour-linked mobility.
- **Socio-Economic Mapping:** It will collect data on **remittance flows, changes in income, access**

to **healthcare**, and living conditions of migrants at their destinations.

Significance for Policymaking

- **Social Security Portability:** Reliable data will strengthen the implementation of schemes like **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** by identifying high-migration corridors.
- **Urban Management:** Assists in planning **housing, transport**, and civic infrastructure in cities facing high migration pressure.
- **Labour Welfare:** Helps the government address challenges in the **informal economy**, such as lack of social safety nets for seasonal workers.
- **Skill Development:** Identifies regional skill gaps and labour shortages to align **vocational training** programs with migrant flow patterns.

Additional Info

- **Current Migration Trends (PLFS 2020-21):**
 - **Overall Migration Rate:** Estimated at **28.9%** across India.
 - **Gender Disparity:**
 - **Females:** Migration rate of **47.9%**, primarily driven by **marriage (86.8%)**.
 - **Males:** Migration rate of **10.7%**, primarily driven by **employment (22.8%)**.
- **Institutional Framework:**
 - **Usual Place of Residence (UPR):** Defined as a place where a person has stayed continuously for **six months or more**.
 - **Coverage:** The survey will cover all States and Union Territories, excluding only the inaccessible villages of the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.
- **Constitutional Link:**
 - **Article 19(1)(d) & (e):** Guarantees the right to move freely throughout the territory of India and to reside and settle in any part of the country.

NAMASTE Scheme

First Nationwide Enumeration Reveals 84.5% Waste-pickers from SC/ST/OBC Communities

What's the News?

- The **Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** released the first nationwide enumeration data of **waste-pickers** under the **NAMASTE scheme**.
- The data reveals deep **caste-based concentration** in informal urban labour — **84.5%** of enumerated waste-pickers belong to **SC, ST, and OBC** communities.
- A total of **1.52 lakh waste-pickers** have been profiled and validated by **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** across **35 States/UTs**.
- The enumeration exercise was recently expanded to include waste-pickers alongside the scheme's original focus on **sewer and septic tank workers**.

Social Composition and Demographics?

- **Caste-wise Distribution:**
 - **Scheduled Castes (SC):** 60.3% (92,089 workers) — largest group

- **Other Backward Classes (OBC):** 13.7% (20,954 workers)
- **Scheduled Tribes (ST):** 10.5% (16,030 workers)
- **General Category:** 10.7% (16,329 workers)
- **Other Communities:** 4.9% (7,402 workers)
- **Gender Profile:**
 - **Men:** 51.3% (78,374)
 - **Women:** 48.7% (74,427)
 - **Transgender:** 0.007% (12 persons)
 - Indicates near **gender parity** in waste-picking workforce
- **Regional Variations:**
 - **Delhi and Goa:** General category waste-pickers outnumber SC/ST/OBC combined — diverging sharply from national pattern
 - **West Bengal:** 42.4% waste-pickers from General category

About NAMASTE Scheme?

- **Full Form:** National Action for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem
- **Type:** Central Sector Scheme
- **Implementing Ministry:** Joint initiative of **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment** and **Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs**
- **Implementing Agency:** **National Safai Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC)**
- **Duration:** FY 2023-24 to FY 2025-26
- **Budget:** ₹349.73 crore (3-year period)

Objectives:

- Eliminate **manual engagement** in hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning
- Achieve **zero fatalities** in sanitation work
- Promote **complete mechanisation** of sanitation operations
- Enable **sanipreneurship** through Self-Help Groups (SHGs)
- **Formalise and rehabilitate** sanitation workers and waste-pickers

Key Components:

- **Digital Profiling:** Dedicated mobile app for enumeration of sewer/septic tank workers and waste-pickers
- **Health Coverage:** All identified workers covered under **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)**
- **Safety Training:** Occupational safety training for workers and Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs)
- **Capital Subsidy:** Up to ₹5 lakh for procuring mechanised sanitation equipment
- **PPE Distribution:** Personal Protective Equipment kits for all enumerated workers
- **IEC Campaigns:** Awareness drives on worker safety and dignity

Hazardous Sanitation Deaths?

- **859 deaths** reported due to hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks since **2014**.
- **43 deaths** recorded in **2025** alone.
- Highlights urgent need for **mechanisation** and strict enforcement of safety protocols.

Additional Info

- **Waste-picker Definition** (per **SWM Rules 2016**):

- Persons informally engaged in collection and recovery of **reusable and recyclable solid waste** from streets, bins, material recovery facilities, and disposal sites for sale to recyclers to earn livelihood.
- **Distinct from manual scavengers** who handle human excreta.
- **Constitutional and Legal Framework:**
 - **Article 17:** Abolishes untouchability and forbids its practice in any form.
 - **Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013:** Bans manual scavenging and mandates rehabilitation.
 - **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016:** Recognises waste-pickers and mandates their integration into formal waste management systems.
- **SDG Alignment:**
 - **SDG 6:** Clean Water and Sanitation
 - **SDG 8:** Decent Work and Economic Growth
 - **SDG 10:** Reduced Inequalities
- **Linked Sanitation Data:**
 - **91.95%** of sewer and septic tank workers enumerated under NAMASTE also belong to SC/ST/OBC communities.
 - Approx. **89,000 sewer/septic tank workers** profiled so far, of which **95.8% are men**.
- **Scheme Convergence:**
 - Complements **Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0** by addressing worker safety and mechanisation gaps.
 - Aligns with **National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM)** for informal worker welfare.

Government Launches Bharat Taxi

What's the News?

- Union Home and Cooperation Minister **Amit Shah** formally launched **Bharat Taxi**, India's first cooperative-led ride-hailing platform, marking a significant push toward driver-owned mobility under the **Sahkar se Samridhhi** vision.
- The platform operates on a **zero-commission, surge-free model** with drivers (called **Sarathis**) as shareholders and owners, positioning it as an indigenous alternative to private aggregators like Uber and Ola.
- Following a successful pilot in **Delhi-NCR and Gujarat**, Bharat Taxi aims for nationwide rollout across all states within the next **two to three years**.

The Platform: Key Features

- **Driver-Owned Cooperative Model:** Registered under the **Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002** (established June 6, 2025), operating on the principle "**Sarathi Hi Malik**" (driver is the owner).
- **Zero Commission:** Unlike private platforms charging **20-30% commission**, Bharat Taxi distributes full fares directly to drivers, with profits shared among cooperative members.

- **Social Security Package:**
 - ₹5 lakh personal accident insurance
 - ₹5 lakh family health insurance
 - Retirement savings and emergency support
- **Non-Exclusive Model:** Drivers can simultaneously work on other platforms without restrictions.
- **Safety & Digital Integration:** One-tap SOS linked to police control rooms, live ride tracking, emergency alerts, multilingual app interface, and integration with **Delhi Metro** for last-mile connectivity.

Operational Performance & Expansion

- **Pilot Success** (since December):
 - Over **3 lakh drivers** onboarded
 - More than **6.7 lakh users** registered
 - Approximately **10,000 rides completed daily**
 - Around **₹10 crore** distributed directly to drivers
- **Women Empowerment:** "Bike Didi" initiative with over **150 women drivers** already enrolled.
- **Future Plans:** Support centres in every state, deeper integration with India's **digital public infrastructure**, and partnerships with public and private stakeholders.

Additional Info

- **Sahakar Taxi Cooperative Limited:** The operating entity backed by **eight major cooperative organisations** including **National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), Amul (GCMMF), NABARD, IFFCO, and National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).**
- **Market Context:**
 - India's taxi market projected to grow from **\$21.07 billion (2025)** to **\$44.3 billion (2032)** at **11.2% CAGR.**
 - Ride-hailing expected to account for **58.6%** of market share in 2025.
 - Existing driver discontent: **74%** of drivers on private platforms consider incentive systems unfair; **65%** report income drops compared to pre-2020 levels.
- **Constitutional & Legal Framework:**
 - **Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002:** Governing legislation for Bharat Taxi's registration.
 - **Ministry of Cooperation:** Created in 2021 to strengthen cooperative movement; headed by Union Home Minister.
 - **Article 19(1)(c):** Fundamental right to form associations or unions (basis for cooperative societies).
 - **Article 43:** Directive Principle promoting cooperative organisation of agriculture and industry.
 - **97th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2011:** Added **Part IXB** to Constitution, providing constitutional status to cooperative societies.
- **Comparison with Namma Yatri:** Bengaluru-based subscription platform facilitating ~1,90,000 rides daily, demonstrating viability of driver-centric alternatives.

Paradip Port Authority Wins First Prize at Swachhata Pakhwada Awards 2025

What's the News?

- **Paradip Port Authority (PPA)** has been awarded the **First Prize** at the **Swachhata Pakhwada Awards 2025** for its exemplary performance in cleanliness, sustainability, and community participation.
- The award was presented by the Union Minister of **Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal**, during a ceremony held in New Delhi.
- The recognition highlights the port's successful implementation of large-scale sanitation drives and green initiatives under the **Swachh Bharat Mission.**
- Other major ports, including **V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority** and **Chennai Port Authority**, were also recognized, jointly securing the second prize for their cleanliness efforts.

Swachhata Pakhwada Awards 2025?

- **Instituting Body:** The awards are an annual initiative of the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)** to evaluate maritime organizations and major ports across India.
- **Assessment Parameters:** Organizations are judged on their execution of cleanliness drives, waste management practices, advocacy, and the welfare of sanitation workers.
- **Core Objectives:**
 - To promote a cleaner and more sustainable work environment within the maritime sector.
 - To encourage **Jan Bhagidari** (Public Participation) in the national cleanliness mission.
 - To integrate environmental stewardship into the operational framework of India's major ports.

Paradip Port's Key Pillars?

- **Jan Bhagidari (Public Participation):** The port organized extensive cleanliness campaigns involving schools, local communities, and heritage sites to embed a culture of hygiene.
- **Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam:**
 - Under this green initiative, the port successfully planted **40,000 saplings** at **Paradip Sea Beach.**
 - The drive transformed previously neglected areas into "clean green zones," supporting coastal biodiversity.
- **Safai Mitra Suraksha:**
 - Focused on the dignity, safety, and health of sanitation workers (Safai Mitras).
 - Included the distribution of specialized safety gear and the organization of health check-up camps.
- **Innovative Waste Management:**
 - **Scrap to Structure:** An initiative to repurpose industrial waste and scrap into functional or artistic installations.
 - **Waste to Wealth:** Exhibitions held to demonstrate sustainable ways to reuse assets and reduce the environmental footprint of port operations.

- **Anti-Plastic Drive:** Conducted awareness rallies and distributed cotton bags to discourage the use of single-use plastics under the theme "**End Plastic Pollution.**"

Additional Info

- **Paradip Port Authority (PPA):**
 - Located in **Jagatsinghpur, Odisha**, it is a premier major port on the East Coast of India.
 - It recently achieved a historic milestone by handling a record **14.44 MMT** of cargo in a single month (January 2026).
- **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM):**
 - **SBM-Urban 2.0:** Aims to make all Indian cities "Garbage Free" through 100% source segregation and scientific processing of municipal solid waste.
 - **Special Campaign 5.0:** A government initiative used by PPA to renovate administrative buildings and minimize office pendency while institutionalizing cleanliness.
- **Constitutional & Policy Links:**
 - **Article 51A (g):** Mandates the fundamental duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, and rivers.
 - **National Mission for a Green India (GIM):** One of the eight missions under the **National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)**, which aligns with the port's massive plantation drives.

NDMA Releases India's First-Ever Disaster Victim Identification Guidelines

What's the News?

- The **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** has released India's **first comprehensive national guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** for **Disaster Victim Identification (DVI)** to standardize the handling of mass fatality incidents.
- The guidelines, titled "**National Disaster Management Guidelines on Comprehensive Disaster Victim Identification and Management**", were released by the **Ministry of Home Affairs** to address critical gaps exposed by recent disasters.
- This framework aims to ensure **scientific identification, legal certification, and dignified handover** of human remains to families, moving away from ad hoc responses to institutionalized protocols.

Why Were These Guidelines Needed?

- **Recent Mass Fatality Incidents:** A series of major disasters in 2025 highlighted systemic gaps:
 - **Air India crash** in Ahmedabad
 - **Chemical factory explosion** in Sangareddy, Telangana
 - **Gambhira bridge collapse** in Vadodara
 - **Flash floods** in Dharali, Uttarakhand
 - **Car bomb blast** near Red Fort, Delhi
- **Persistent Challenges:** Victims remained unidentified or faced significant delays in identification, causing

prolonged distress to families and administrative bottlenecks.

- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Lack of mortuary capacity, cold chain transport, and trained forensic manpower compounded the crisis.
- **Climate Change Impact:** Increasing frequency of extreme weather events necessitates robust mass fatality management systems.

Key Features of the DVI Guidelines

Four-Stage Identification Process

- **Stage 1 – Scene Phase:** Systematic recovery, tagging, documentation, and preservation of human remains at the disaster site.
- **Stage 2 – Post-Mortem Data Collection:** Medico-legal examination including **DNA profiling, fingerprints, forensic odontology** (dental records), and physical markers.
- **Stage 3 – Ante-Mortem Data Collection:** Gathering medical history, dental records, biometric data, and personal identifiers from families.
- **Stage 4 – Reconciliation:** Scientific matching of post-mortem and ante-mortem data, followed by certification and release of remains.

Scientific and Technological Innovations

- **Primary Identifiers Mandated:**
 - **Fingerprints**
 - **Forensic odontology** (dental records)
 - **DNA profiling**
- **Secondary Identifiers:** Tattoos, scars, ornaments (supporting evidence only).
- **Advanced Forensic Techniques:**
 - **Virtual autopsy** and **forensic archaeology** for remains buried or discovered months/years after disasters.
 - **Digital biometrics** from mobile phones and smart devices recovered at sites.
 - **AI-based facial reconstruction** from damaged remains.
- **National Dental Data Registry:** Proposed centralized registry leveraging the durability of teeth and jaws for identification in fire, explosion, or decomposition scenarios.

Operational Framework

- **Unified Command Structure:** Designation of an **Operational DVI Incident Commander** to coordinate police, forensic experts, health officials, and disaster responders.
- **Humanitarian Approach:**
 - No mandatory mass autopsies; sensitivity to community customs and religious practices.
 - Emotional support and counseling for affected families.
 - Focus on dignity and timely closure rather than mere procedural compliance.

Additional Info

- **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA):**
 - Established under the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**.
 - An apex body chaired by the **Prime Minister of India**.

- Responsible for laying down policies, plans, and guidelines for disaster management to ensure a timely and effective response.
- **Constitutional & Legal Context:**
 - **Article 21:** The Supreme Court of India has held that the **Right to Life** includes the **Right to Dignity** even after death, including the right to a decent burial/cremation according to religious customs.
 - **Section 34 of the DM Act:** Empowers district authorities to facilitate the identification and disposal of bodies in a manner that prevents health hazards and maintains dignity.
- **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB):**
 - The nodal agency for maintaining the **National Digital Database** of missing persons and unidentified bodies, which will be integrated with the DVI process.

Tripartite Agreement Signed for Creation of Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA)

What's the News?

- A **tripartite agreement** was signed between the **Government of India**, the **Government of Nagaland**, and the **Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO)** to establish the **Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA)**.
- The agreement, signed in the presence of **Union Home Minister Amit Shah** and **Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio**, grants enhanced autonomy to six eastern districts of Nagaland while maintaining the state's territorial integrity.
- This arrangement devolves powers over **46 subjects** to the FNTA and provides financial autonomy, marking a significant step toward resolving long-standing demands of Eastern Nagaland tribes.

What is the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority?

Coverage and Structure

- **Districts Included: Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak, and Shamator** — covering eight recognized Naga tribes.
- **Administrative Setup:**
 - **Mini-Secretariat** headed by an **Additional Chief Secretary/Principal Secretary**-level officer.
 - Distinct from **Sixth Schedule** Autonomous District Councils (Nagaland is not under Sixth Schedule).
 - Functions as a **territorial authority within the State of Nagaland**.

Devolution of Powers

- **46 Subjects** transferred to FNTA jurisdiction, enabling local decision-making in key developmental and administrative areas.
- **Article 371(A) Safeguard:** The agreement explicitly states it **does not affect** the provisions of **Article 371(A)**, which protects Naga customary laws, land rights, and social practices.

Financial Provisions

- **Proportional Development Outlay:** Funds allocated based on **population and area** of Eastern Nagaland.
- **Fixed Annual Allocation:** Centre will provide a predetermined amount every year.
- **Initial Establishment Costs:** Borne by the **Union Ministry of Home Affairs**.

Background and Context

Eastern Nagaland Grievances

- **Historical Neglect:** Eastern Nagaland tribes have alleged decades of underdevelopment and marginalization since Nagaland's statehood in 1963.
- **Statehood Demand:** The **ENPO**, apex body representing Eastern Nagaland tribes, initially demanded a separate state since **2010**, later agreeing to the autonomous FNTA framework.
- **Election Boycott:** In the **2021–22 elections**, ENPO had threatened to boycott polls, prompting Union Home Minister intervention to initiate dialogue.

Negotiation Timeline

- **2015:** Formal negotiations began between ENPO and the Centre.
- **2021–22:** Amit Shah assured ENPO of a solution if they participated in the democratic process.
- **2025:** Final agreement reached after prolonged dialogue facilitated by Ministry of Home Affairs officers acting as a bridge between ENPO and the Nagaland government.

Additional Info

Article 371(A) – Constitutional Safeguards for Nagaland

- **Insertion:** Added through the **13th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1962**, when Nagaland achieved statehood.
- **Protections:**
 - **Parliamentary Laws:** No Central Act applies to Nagaland regarding **religious/social practices, customary law, land ownership, and resource rights** unless the **Nagaland Legislative Assembly** passes a resolution approving it.
 - **Governor's Special Responsibility:** Maintains law and order in the former Naga Hills-Tuensang area and ensures proper utilization of Central funds.
 - **Tuensang Regional Council:** Article 371A originally provided for a **35-member Regional Council** for Tuensang district with the Deputy Commissioner as ex-officio Chairman.
 - **Legislative Autonomy:** State laws do not apply to Tuensang unless approved by the Governor based on the Regional Council's recommendation.

Comparison with Other Autonomous Arrangements

Feature	FNTA	Sixth Schedule Councils	Article 371A Regions
Constitutional Basis	Tripartite Agreement	Sixth Schedule, Constitution	Article 371A, Constitution

Feature	FNTA	Sixth Schedule Councils	Article 371A Regions
States Covered	Nagaland (6 districts)	Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram	Nagaland (entire state)
Powers	46 subjects devolved	Legislative, judicial, executive powers	Customary law protection
Financial Autonomy	Fixed Central allocation + proportion al outlay	Own revenue + State/Centr al grants	State-managed with Governor oversight

Government's North-East Peace Initiatives

- Since **2019**, the Modi government has signed **12 major agreements** in the North-East, including:
 - **Bodo Accord (2020)**
 - **Karbi Anglong Agreement (2021)**
 - **Assam-Meghalaya Border Agreement (2022)**
- **Philosophy:** Shift from "signing agreements to implementing them in letter and spirit," contrasting with previous administrations.

NSO Launches MCP Server to Democratise Official Statistics

What's the News?

- The **National Statistics Office (NSO)** under the **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** launched the **beta version of a Model Context Protocol (MCP) server** integrated with the **eSankhyiki portal**, India's national repository for official statistics.
- This initiative enables **direct, machine-readable access** to government datasets through AI tools and analytics platforms, eliminating the need for manual downloads of large data files.
- The launch aligns with the **Viksit Bharat vision** and precedes the **India-AI Impact Summit 2026**, demonstrating the government's push toward **data-driven governance** and **AI integration** in public administration.

Model Context Protocol (MCP) Server?

- **Technology Overview:** MCP is an open protocol that allows AI assistants to connect directly with data sources through a standardized interface.
- **Key Capabilities:**
 - **Real-time querying** of datasets without downloading files
 - **Automated report generation** using current statistics
 - **Single connection access** to multiple datasets
 - **Integration** with custom AI applications and analytical tools

- **User Benefits:** Reduces time spent on data access and processing, enabling researchers, businesses, and policymakers to focus on analysis and decision-making.

Datasets Available (Beta Release)

- **Seven major statistical products** currently onboarded:
 - **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)**
 - **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**
 - **Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)**
 - **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**
 - **National Accounts Statistics**
 - **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)**
 - **Environmental Statistics**
- **Expansion Plan:** Additional datasets from eSankhyiki will be added progressively based on user feedback and technical readiness.

National Statistical Office (NSO):

- The **NSO** was created by merging the **Central Statistics Office (CSO)** and the **National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)** to streamline data collection and dissemination.
- It is the nodal agency for conducting large-scale surveys and publishing critical economic indicators such as **GDP**, **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**, and the **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)**.

Form 7 Controversy: Mass Voter Deletions Trigger Electoral Integrity Debate

What's the News?

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** faces serious allegations regarding **misuse of Form 7** during the ongoing **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls across multiple states.
- Opposition parties, led by the **Congress**, have accused organized actors of filing **bulk Form 7 applications** to systematically delete eligible voters particularly from **marginalized communities** without their knowledge or consent.
- The controversy has escalated to the **Supreme Court**, with West Bengal Chief Minister **Mamata Banerjee** becoming the first sitting CM to personally argue her case regarding electoral roll irregularities.
- The ECI has removed approximately **6.5 crore voters** from draft rolls across **nine states and three Union Territories**, categorizing them as **ASD (Absent, Shifted, Dead/Duplicate)** raising concerns about procedural fairness and verification adequacy.

Form 7: Mechanism and Legal Framework

What is Form 7?

- **Statutory Purpose:** Form 7 is used to **object to the inclusion** of a person's name in the electoral roll on specific grounds; **death, duplication, shifting of residence, ineligibility due to age, or lack of citizenship**.
- **Legal Basis:** Governed by **Rule 26 of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960**, framed under the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**.
- **Filing Authority:** Any **registered voter within the same constituency** can file objections (expanded from same-polling-booth restriction via **2022 amendment**).

2022 Amendment: Widened Ambit, Increased Risk

- **Earlier Rule:** Only voters from the **same polling booth** could file objections.
- **Current Rule:** Any voter within the **same constituency** can object, significantly expanding the form's reach.
- **Safeguard: Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)** must mandatorily verify all claims if an individual files **more than five objections**.

Special Intensive Revision (SIR): Scale and Process

Phase II Coverage

- **Total electorate covered:** Approximately **51 crore voters** across:
 - **States:** Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal
 - **Union Territories:** Puducherry, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep
- **Enumeration forms distributed:** Over **50.94 crore** (99.94% coverage of target electorate)

Deletion Statistics (ASD Category)

State/UT	Deletions
Uttar Pradesh	2.89 crore
Tamil Nadu	97 lakh
Gujarat	74 lakh
Total across 9 States + 3 UTs	6.5 crore

- **Pre-revision electorate:** 51 crore
- **Post-draft publication:** 44.4 crore

Verification Protocol

- **Booth Level Officers (BLOs)** conduct **physical verification** at voter addresses.
- **Death claims:** Require confirmation from **three neighbours + death certificate**.
- **Absence claims:** Require **three physical visits** to confirm relocation.
- **Due process:** Affected voters receive **7-day notice** and **hearing opportunity** before deletion.
- **Appeal mechanism:** Appeals to **District Magistrate** within **15 days** of roll publication.

Allegations of Systemic Misuse

Congress Party's Charges

- **"Systematic and coordinated abuse":** Bulk pre-printed Form 7 applications allegedly submitted through a **centralized mechanism**.
- **Targeted demographics:** Specific focus on **Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, and senior citizens above 60 years**.
- **Procedural violations:** Forms allegedly contained **invalid mobile numbers, illegible EPIC details, and unverifiable objector identities**.
- **Political weaponization:** Claims that **BJP booth-level agents (BLAs)** and ruling party members filed objections without voter knowledge.

High-Profile Cases

- **Padma Shri awardees targeted:** Gujarati humorist **Shahabuddin Rathod** and folk musician **Haji Ramakdu** (Junagadh) had Form 7 applications filed

against them; despite being recently announced **Padma Shri 2026 recipients**.

- **Rajasthan:** Congress State President **Govind Singh Dotasra** alleged **627 forms** in his constituency alone, with **2,000 additional forms rejected** by SDM due to forged BLO signatures.
- **West Bengal:** **1.67 crore initial deletions** challenged and reduced to **1.37 crore**, then **98 lakh** after ongoing objections.

Assam Controversy

- **Communal targeting allegations:** Chief Minister **Himanta Biswa Sarma** publicly urged BJP workers to file Form 7 against **"Miyas"** (Bengali-speaking Muslims alleged to be Bangladeshi origin).
- **Supreme Court petition:** Opposition leader **Debabrata Saikia** sought **suo motu cognizance** from CJI **Surya Kant**, terming it an "unprecedented admission of intent to interfere with the electorate on communal lines."

Supreme Court Interventions

January 2026 Directions

A bench led by **CJI Surya Kant** (with Justices **Dipankar Datta** and **Joymalya Bagchi**) issued binding directives to the ECI:

- **Transparency measures:** Publish lists of voters issued notices for "logical discrepancies" at local administrative offices.
- **Accessibility:** Expand hearing venues to **panchayats and block offices**; mandate **written receipts** for all submissions.
- **Voter assistance:** Ensure proper intimation, adequate assistance, and meaningful opportunity to substantiate credentials.
- **Core principle:** Corrections permissible, but **"cannot come at the cost of fairness, due process, and voter confidence."**

Mamata Banerjee's Petition

- **Historic appearance:** First sitting Chief Minister to personally argue in Supreme Court.
- **Key demands:**
 - Withdrawal of all prior hearing notices.
 - Online publication of **Form 7 recipients** to prevent bulk deletions.
 - **Aadhaar acceptance** as valid proof without additional documents.
 - Empower **local EROs** to decide inter-state migration cases after five days.
 - Remove **micro-observers** from verification process or bar them from hearings.
 - Mandate **in-person appearance** for complainants filing Form 7 objections.

Legal Penalties and Accountability

Section 31, Representation of the People Act, 1950

- **Offense:** Filing false declarations in connection with electoral roll preparation/revision.
- **Punishment: Imprisonment up to one year, or fine, or both.**
- **Current status:** Despite legal provisions, **no mass FIRs registered** against fraudulent objectors; ECI accused of "looking the other way."

Additional Info

Electoral Roll Management: Constitutional & Legal Framework

- **Article 324: Election Commission** superintendence, direction, and control of preparation of electoral rolls for Parliament and State Legislatures.
- **Representation of the People Act, 1950:** Governs conduct of elections and preparation of electoral rolls.
- **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960:** Procedural rules for voter registration, objections, and verification.

Key Institutional Stakeholders

Institution	Role
Election Commission of India (ECI)	Constitutional body overseeing electoral roll integrity
Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)	District-level officials responsible for roll maintenance
Booth Level Officers (BLOs)	Ground-level verification and field inquiries
Booth Level Agents (BLAs)	Political party representatives at polling stations
District Election Officers (DEOs)	Overall coordination at district level

Booth Level Agents (BLAs): Revised Criteria (November 2025)

- **Earlier requirement:** BLA must be registered voter in **same polling station**.
- **Current requirement:** BLA can be from **different polling booth in same Assembly constituency**.
- **Implication:** Increased potential for **non-local objections** and reduced community-level accountability.

Alternative Mechanisms for Roll Purification

- **National Register of Births and Deaths:** Civil society demands integration with electoral rolls to prevent fraudulent death-based deletions.
- **Aadhaar-EPIC linkage:** Proposed for identity verification without additional document burden.
- **QR code-enabled voter slips:** Piloted for real-time verification.

Related Electoral Reforms

- **Electoral Bonds Scheme:** Struck down by Supreme Court (February 2024) for transparency in political funding.
- **Linking Aadhaar with Voter ID: Electoral Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021** enabled voluntary linkage to prevent duplication.
- **Remote voting for NRIs:** Proposed via **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)**.

Supreme Court Directs 17 States to Establish Special NIA Courts

What's the News?

- The **Supreme Court of India** has directed **17 states and Union Territories** to respond on the establishment of **exclusive special courts** for trials under the **National Investigation Agency (NIA) Act**, following a proposal by the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**.
- The directive aims to address the **growing pendency of anti-terror cases**, with the Centre committing **₹1 crore per court** for both recurring and non-recurring expenditures.
- A bench led by **Chief Justice of India Surya Kant** emphasized that **delayed trials lead to injustice**, particularly for undertrials who may ultimately be acquitted after prolonged incarceration.

Special NIA Courts: Why Now?

- **Pendency Crisis:** Over **10 pending NIA Act cases** exist in each of the 17 identified states/UTs, with **Delhi leading at 59 cases**, followed by **Jammu & Kashmir (38)**, and **Assam, Gujarat, and Kerala (33 each)**.
- **Speedy Trial Imperative:** The Court noted that **exclusive courts** are essential to ensure trials proceed on a **weekly basis**, preventing the common delay of **2-3 months between hearings** in regular courts.
- **Witness Protection & Liberty:** Faster trials are linked to **better witness protection** and safeguard the **liberty of accused** persons who cannot be held indefinitely without trial, even in serious cases involving national security.

Funding & Implementation Framework

- **Central Funding:** Each special court receives:
 - **₹1 crore one-time grant** for non-recurring expenses (infrastructure renovation, IT equipment, vehicles).
 - **₹1 crore annual grant** for recurring costs (staff salaries, operational expenses).
- **State Responsibilities:** States must provide **judicial officers and staff** from their existing cadre, earmarking existing courtrooms rather than constructing new complexes.
- **Delhi Model:** **16 exclusive courts** are being established at **Rouse Avenue Court Complex** to handle NIA Act, **UAPA**, and **NDPS Act** cases, expected to be operational by **April 2026** with officers from the **Delhi Higher Judicial Service**.

Additional Info

- **NIA Act, 2008:**
 - Established the **National Investigation Agency** as the central counter-terrorism law enforcement agency.
 - **Section 11** empowers the Central Government to designate **special courts** for NIA trials, with the **Chief Justice of the relevant High Court** appointing the judge.
 - **Exclusive Jurisdiction:** Special courts have precedence over other courts and are required to conduct **speedy trials** with daily hearings where possible.

- **Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Article 21:** Right to **speedy trial** is a fundamental right, as established in *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar* (1979).
 - **Article 246 & Seventh Schedule:** While **criminal law** and **criminal procedure** are on the **Concurrent List**, the Centre can establish special courts under central statutes for offenses of national importance.
- **Current Status:**
 - Some states already have functioning exclusive NIA courts: **Bihar (Patna), Jammu, Ranchi (Jharkhand), and Mumbai (Maharashtra).**
 - The Supreme Court will review progress after three weeks, with **Advocate Generals** directed to remain present for the next hearing.

PNGRB Approves Guidelines for CBG Injection into Natural Gas Networks

What's the News?

- The **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB)** approved comprehensive **guidelines for injection of Compressed Biogas (CBG)** into **Natural Gas Pipelines (NGPL)** and **City Gas Distribution (CGD)** networks.
- The guidelines establish a standardized framework for safe, efficient integration of domestically produced green gas into India's authorized natural gas infrastructure.

CBG Injection Guidelines

- **Quality Specifications:** Defines clear quality standards and technical specifications for CBG to ensure compatibility with existing natural gas infrastructure.
- **Installation Procedures:** Standardizes installation protocols for CBG injection facilities connecting production plants to pipelines.
- **Safety Requirements:** Mandates odorization, control systems, and other safety measures for pipeline injection operations.
- **Technical Configurations:** Includes illustrative schematic drawings for uniform design interpretation and implementation across CGD and NGPL networks.
- **Stakeholder Clarity:** Provides regulatory certainty for **CBG project developers, CGD entities, technology providers, and investors.**

Significance

- **Energy Security:** Reduces dependence on **imported LNG** by mainstreaming domestically produced green gas into the national energy mix.
- **Project Viability:** Assured pipeline-based evacuation improves financing prospects and investment attractiveness for CBG projects.
- **Feedstock Utilization:** Facilitates higher utilization of:
 - **Agricultural residue**
 - **Cattle dung**
 - **Municipal solid waste**
 - **Other organic feedstocks**

- **Environmental Impact:** Supports India's climate goals by promoting clean fuel adoption and reducing **crop residue burning.**

Development Process

- **Consultative Approach:** Guidelines developed through extensive stakeholder engagement including:
 - **Technical Committee** with representatives from CBG producers, CGD entities, and NGPL pipeline operators.
 - **Public Consultation:** Draft guidelines placed in public domain for comments.
 - **Open House Meeting:** Detailed deliberations with industry participants.
- **Technical Focus:** Addresses specific technical, operational, and safety aspects unique to CBG injection.

Additional Info

- **About PNGRB:**
 - **Established:** 2006 under the **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, 2006.**
 - **Nature:** Statutory regulatory body for downstream petroleum and natural gas sector.
 - **Headquarters:** New Delhi.
 - **Key Functions:**
 - Authorizes and regulates pipelines, LNG terminals, and CGD networks.
 - Monitors prices and ensures fair competition.
 - Specifies pipeline access codes and regulates transportation tariffs.
 - Lays down technical standards and safety norms.
 - Maintains sectoral data bank for infrastructure planning.
- **CBG Context:**
 - **Compressed Biogas:** Purified biogas (primarily methane) compressed to pressure suitable for pipeline injection or vehicle fuel.
 - **SATAT Initiative: Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation** scheme promotes CBG as alternative to CNG in automotive sector.
 - **GOBARdhan: Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan** scheme supports CBG production from agricultural and organic waste.

Government Pauses Privilege Motion Against LoP

What's the News?

- The Union Government announced it would move a **Privilege Notice** against **Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi** for allegedly making baseless and misleading statements during the **Budget discussion** in the **Lok Sabha.**
- Parliamentary Affairs Minister **Kiren Rijju** accused Gandhi of making serious allegations against **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** and Union Minister **Hardeep Singh Puri** without prior notice or substantiation, calling it a breach of parliamentary rules.

- The government has since **temporarily shelved** its proposed motion after BJP MP **Nishikant Dubey** submitted a "**substantive motion**" demanding the immediate cancellation of Gandhi's Lok Sabha membership.

What Triggered the Controversy?

- **Reference to Unpublished Book:** Gandhi cited "**Four Stars of Destiny**", the unpublished memoir of former Army Chief General **MM Naravane**, during his speech. He claimed the book showed the Prime Minister had "**abdicated responsibility**" during the **2020 India-China standoff**.
- **Speaker's Ruling:** The Speaker had previously ruled against citing unpublished literature in the House.
- **Government's Position:** The Ministry of Defence maintains the book is still under review, and quoting it constitutes both a procedural violation and a distortion of facts.

What is a Privilege Notice?

- A **Privilege Notice** is a formal complaint raised by a Member of Parliament alleging a **breach of privilege or contempt of the House**.
- **Parliamentary Privilege** refers to special rights and immunities enjoyed by Parliament and its members to ensure they can perform duties without obstruction or intimidation.

Grounds for Moving a Privilege Notice:

- Obstruction of a member from performing parliamentary duties.
- Misleading the House by providing false information.
- Defamation or attack on the dignity of Parliament or its members.
- Publication of distorted or expunged proceedings.
- Contempt of the House (any act lowering its authority).

Procedure:

- A member submits a **written notice** to the **Speaker** (Lok Sabha) or **Chairman** (Rajya Sabha).
- The Presiding Officer decides admissibility.
- If admitted, it may be:
 - Taken up directly in the House, or
 - Referred to the **Committee of Privileges** for investigation.
- The Committee examines evidence and submits a report; the House then decides on punishment.

Punishments for Breach of Privilege:

- **Admonition** (warning)
- **Reprimand**
- **Imprisonment**
- **Suspension** (for members)
- **Expulsion** (for members)

Constitutional & Legal Framework

- **Article 105:** Powers, privileges, and immunities of Parliament and its members.
- **Article 194:** Similar provisions for State Legislatures.
- **Article 122:** Courts cannot question validity of parliamentary proceedings on grounds of procedural irregularity.
- **Article 105(2):** Provides immunity to MPs for anything said or any vote given in Parliament.

Urban Challenge Fund: ₹1 Lakh Crore for Market-Led Urban Transformation

What's the News?

- The **Union Cabinet** has approved the **Urban Challenge Fund (UCF)** with **₹1 lakh crore** in central assistance to drive transformative urban infrastructure development through market-linked financing.
- The fund aims to catalyze **₹4 lakh crore** in total urban investment over the next five years, marking a paradigm shift from grant-based to reform-driven, outcome-oriented urban development.
- First announced in **Union Budget 2025–26**, the scheme will be operational from **FY 2025–26 to FY 2030–31**, extendable up to FY 2033–34.

Features & Funding Structure

- **Central Assistance: 25% of project cost** covered by Centre, contingent on:
 - **Minimum 50% market mobilization** through municipal bonds, bank loans, or PPPs
 - **Remaining 25%** contributed by states/UTs/ULBs/external parties
- **Challenge-Based Selection:** Competitive framework prioritizing high-impact, reform-oriented proposals with transformative economic, social, and climate outcomes.
- **Reform-Linked Disbursement:** Fund release tied to governance, financial, and operational reform milestones.
- **Credit Enhancement:** Dedicated **₹5,000 crore corpus** to strengthen creditworthiness of **4,223 cities**, particularly Tier-II and Tier-III urban bodies.
- **Credit Repayment Guarantee Scheme:**
 - **First borrowing:** Up to ₹7 crore or 70% of loan (whichever is lower)
 - **Subsequent borrowing:** Up to ₹7 crore or 50% of loan after successful repayment
 - Targets smaller ULBs in **Northeastern and hilly states** and cities below 1 lakh population

Target Cities & Project Verticals

- **Eligible Cities:**
 - All cities with population **above 10 lakh**
 - All **state and UT capitals**
 - Major industrial cities with population **above 1 lakh**
 - Special focus on **Tier-II, Tier-III cities** and **Northeastern/hilly regions**
- **Three Project Verticals:**
 - **Cities as Growth Hubs:** Greenfield/semi-greenfield development, trunk infrastructure, transit corridors, counter-magnets
 - **Creative Redevelopment:** Legacy infrastructure retrofitting, pedestrianization, CBD rejuvenation, heritage core restoration, brownfield regeneration
 - **Water and Sanitation:** Water supply upgrades, sewerage/stormwater systems, water grids, solid waste management, legacy waste remediation

Additional Info

- **Nodal Ministry: Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)**
- **Digital Governance:** Paperless tracking via single MoHUA digital portal for monitoring and evaluation.
- **Budget Allocation:** ₹10,000 crore allocated in both **2025–26** and **2026–27** budgets.
- **Related Urban Missions:**
 - **Smart Cities Mission:** Technology-driven urban renewal (completed in 2024)
 - **AMRUT 2.0:** Water supply and sewerage infrastructure
 - **Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0:** Solid waste management and sanitation
- **Constitutional Framework:**
 - **74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992:** Constitutional status to ULBs
 - **Article 243W:** Powers, authority, and responsibilities of municipalities
 - **12th Schedule:** Functions of municipalities including urban planning and infrastructure

Absence of Key Parliamentary Committees in the 18th Lok Sabha

What's the News?

- The **18th Lok Sabha** has witnessed a significant delay in the constitution of the **Committee on Privileges** and the **Ethics Committee**.
- Reports indicate that these crucial parliamentary bodies have remained unformed for nearly two years into the current term.
- The issue gained prominence as the government considers referring a motion against the **Leader of Opposition** to one of these panels.

Parliamentary Privileges Committee?

- **Overview:** A **quasi-judicial** standing committee responsible for safeguarding the **privileges, rights, and immunities** of the House and its members to ensure uninterrupted functioning of legislative duties.
- **Composition:**
 - **Lok Sabha:** 15 members nominated by the **Speaker**.
 - **Rajya Sabha:** 10 members nominated by the **Chairman**.
- **Functions:**
 - Investigates **breach of privilege** or **contempt of the House** referred to it.
 - Has powers to **summon individuals**, record statements, and demand documents.
 - Recommends action including **reprimand, suspension, imprisonment** (for session duration), or acceptance of **unconditional apology**.
- **Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Article 105** (Parliament privileges) and **Article 194** (State Legislature privileges).
- **Significance:** Protects lawmakers from legal action (e.g., defamation suits) for statements made within the

House, ensuring **freedom of speech** and **functional autonomy** of Parliament.

Ethics Committee?

- **Overview:** Examines issues related to **members' conduct, ethical standards, and conflict of interest**.
- **Role:** Oversees adherence to the **Code of Conduct** for MPs and investigates complaints regarding unethical behavior.
- **Current Status:** Remains unconstituted along with the Privileges Committee.
- **Political Context:** Government reportedly offered chairmanship to **Congress**, which declined demanding chairmanship of more significant committees (e.g., **Official Language Committee**) instead.

Additional Info

- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 105:** Defines the powers, privileges, and immunities of both Houses of Parliament and their members.
 - **Article 194:** Provides similar privileges for the State Legislatures.
- **Parliamentary Privileges – Historical Context:**
 - Rooted in **British Parliamentary conventions** developed in medieval England to protect the House of Commons from monarchical interference.
 - Essential for maintaining **separation of powers** and **legislative independence**.
- **Types of Privileges:**
 - **Collective Privileges:** Rights enjoyed by the House as a whole (e.g., the right to exclude strangers, right to publish reports).
 - **Individual Privileges:** Rights enjoyed by members individually (e.g., **Freedom of Speech** in Parliament, immunity from arrest in civil cases 40 days before and after a session).
- **Breach of Privilege vs. Contempt of the House:**
 - **Breach of Privilege:** Violation of any of the specific privileges of the House or its members.
 - **Contempt of the House:** Any act that obstructs or impedes the House, its members, or officers in the discharge of their functions, even if no specific privilege is violated.
- **Types of Committees in Parliament:**
 - **Standing Committees:** Permanent bodies (e.g., Privileges Committee, Ethics Committee, DRSCs)
 - **Ad Hoc Committees:** Temporary committees for specific purposes (e.g., Joint Parliamentary Committees)

Union Home Minister Launches Phase II of Vibrant Villages Programme

What's the News?

- Union Home Minister **Amit Shah** launched the second phase of the **Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP-II)** during a ceremony in the **Cachar** district of **Assam**.
- The initiative marks a strategic shift to include border areas in Northeast India, specifically focusing on

strengthening infrastructure and stopping migration from remote frontier villages.

- A total outlay of **₹6,839 crore** has been allocated for the program, which views border villages not as the "last villages" of India, but as the "first villages."

What is Vibrant Villages Programme-II (VVP-II)?

- **Objective:** To improve the quality of life for people living in identified border villages by providing comprehensive developmental interventions.
- **Focus Areas:**
 - **Infrastructure:** Building all-weather roads, providing 24/7 electricity through solar/wind energy, and ensuring functional tap water connections.
 - **Livelihood:** Promoting "One Village One Product" (OVOP) and developing sustainable eco-tourism circuits.
 - **Connectivity:** Enhancing mobile and internet connectivity in "shadow areas" (regions with no signal).
- **Expansion:** While Phase I primarily focused on the northern borders (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Ladakh), **VVP-II** significantly integrates more regions in **Assam** and other Northeastern border belts.

Geographic Scope

The programme extends across **15 States and 2 Union Territories**, targeting borders with:

- Bangladesh (primary focus given launch location in Assam)
- Nepal
- Myanmar
- Bhutan
- Pakistan

This represents a major expansion from VVP-I, which focused exclusively on northern borders (China/Tibet-facing regions).

Four Core Infrastructure Themes:

1. **All-weather road connectivity** (via PMGSY-IV)
2. **Telecom connectivity** (via Digital Bharat Nidhi)
3. **Television connectivity** (via BIND scheme)
4. **Electrification** (via RDSS)

Strategic Village Identification: **1,954 villages** have been identified for intensive development, selected based on their strategic importance and vulnerability to out-migration.

Historical Context

The programme builds on India's evolving border development strategy:

- **1986-87:** Border Area Development Programme (BADP) launched to fill infrastructure gaps
- **2023:** VVP-I introduced for northern borders to reverse out-migration
- **2026:** VVP-II expands the model to all other international land borders with area-specific strategies

Bihar Declared Naxal-Free After Last Armed Maoist Surrenders

What's the News?

- **Bihar** has been officially declared **Naxal-free** following the surrender of the last armed Maoist commander, **Suresh Koda**, in **Munger district**.
- Suresh Koda, also known as **Mustakim**, carried a bounty of **₹3 lakh** on his head.
- The state recorded **zero Naxal incidents in 2025**, marking a complete end to organized Maoist activity.
- Over **220 Maoist arrests** were made during the final phase of counter-insurgency operations.

Surrender Details?

- **Cadre Profile:** Suresh Koda – top Maoist operative carrying a **₹3 lakh bounty**, wanted in **60 cases** including multiple charges under **UAPA**
- **Seized Materials:** Three assault rifles (AK-47, AK-56, INSAS), hundreds of rounds of ammunition, magazines, and cash
- **Rehabilitation Package** under **Atmasmarpan Sah Punarvaas Yojana:**
 - Immediate grant: **₹3 lakh** (equivalent to bounty amount)
 - Incentive amount: **₹5 lakh**
 - Monthly stipend: **₹10,000** for vocational training (36 months)
- **Authority Oversight:** Surrender processed by **Special Task Force (STF)** with coordination between District Magistrate and police leadership

Strategic Achievement?

- **Zero Incidents:** No Naxalite violence reported throughout **2025**
- **Enforcement Success:** **220 Naxalites arrested** in 2025 alone
- **Geographic Coverage:** Complete elimination of armed presence across all 23 previously affected districts
- **Historical Context:** Peak influence in central Bihar during the **1970s**, with 23 districts affected by **2012**
- **State Authority Restoration:** Reinforcement of civil administration and rule of law in former insurgent strongholds

Additional Info

- **Historical Context in Bihar:**
 - Naxalism in the state was historically rooted in agrarian grievances, land redistribution issues, and caste-based oppression.
 - In the 1990s and early 2000s, Bihar witnessed frequent "caste wars" between Maoist groups and private militias (Senas).
- **Policy Framework:**
 - **Aspirational Districts Programme:** Several formerly LWE-affected districts in Bihar, monitored by **NITI Aayog**, saw accelerated development in healthcare and education.
 - **Special Central Assistance (SCA):** This central scheme provided dedicated funds to Bihar for creating public infrastructure in LWE-hit regions.

Debate on Election Commission Independence Resurfaces Amid Electoral Roll Controversy

What's the News?

The independence and credibility of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)** has come under intense scrutiny following allegations of large-scale irregularities in electoral rolls, particularly during the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** exercise in Bihar where approximately **65 lakh voters** were reportedly deleted. The Opposition has moved a resolution seeking removal of the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)**, marking a rare challenge to the constitutional body. The controversy coincides with ongoing legal challenges to the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023**, which altered the appointment process by excluding the Chief Justice of India from the selection committee.

Constitutional Safeguards for ECI Independence

Provision	Safeguard
Article 324	Vests superintendence, direction, and control of elections in ECI; establishes it as a permanent constitutional body
Article 324(5)	CEC removal requires procedure identical to Supreme Court judges under Article 124(4) (proved misbehaviour or incapacity)
Article 324(5)	Service conditions cannot be varied to disadvantage after appointment
Article 324(2)	Multi-member commission structure (since 1993) ensures consensus-based decision making
Section 11, CEC Act 2023	Removal requires investigation under Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 ; needs special majority in Parliament

2023 Appointment Act: Controversy and Concerns

- **Selection Committee Composition:** Prime Minister, Union Minister, and Leader of Opposition (CJI excluded)
- **Supreme Court Intervention:** In *Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023)*, Court mandated CJI inclusion until Parliament enacted a law
- **Current Challenge:** *Jaya Thakur v. Union of India (2024)* challenging exclusion of CJI; next hearing scheduled for **March 2026**
- **Criticism:** Removal of CJI from selection panel raises concerns regarding **executive dominance** and perceived neutrality

Electoral Roll Controversy: Bihar SIR Exercise

- **Special Intensive Revision (SIR):** Conducted to update voter rolls and eliminate duplication
- **Alleged Deletions:** ~65 lakh voters deleted in Bihar; Opposition claims targeting of minority and Opposition-supporting voters
- **Constitutional Implication:** **Article 326** guarantees universal adult franchise; large-scale deletion without adequate notice affects **representational legitimacy**

- **Procedural Safeguards:** Requires verification, notice, and opportunity to respond (principles of natural justice)

Additional Info

- **Removal Procedure for CEC:**
 - **Initiation:** Motion requires **100 MPs in Lok Sabha** or **50 MPs in Rajya Sabha**
 - **Investigation:** Three-member committee (CJI or SC Judge, High Court Chief Justice, distinguished jurist) under **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968**
 - **Defence Rights:** CEC given reasonable time and opportunity to present statement of defence
 - **Medical Examination:** Required in cases of alleged incapacity
 - **Parliamentary Vote:** Special majority needed for removal
- **Removal of Other Commissioners:** By President on recommendation of CEC (as per *Vineet Narain v. Union of India, 1997*, CEC cannot act *suo motu*)
- **Historical Context:**
 - **1989:** Commission made multi-member
 - **1990:** Additional posts abolished
 - **1993:** Permanently made multi-member; validated in *T.N. Seshan v. Union of India (1995)*
- **Basic Structure Doctrine:** Free and fair elections form part of the **basic structure** of Constitution (*Indira Gandhi v. Raj Narain, 1975*); courts can intervene if legislative action undermines electoral fairness
- **Current Status:** Opposition's removal motion unlikely to succeed due to ruling alliance majority; highlights tension between **institutional accountability** and **political contestation**

Centre Approves 2.88 Lakh Houses Under PMAY-U 2.0

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)** has sanctioned the construction of **2.88 lakh** additional houses during the 6th meeting of the **Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee (CSMC)**.
- The approval covers projects across **9 States/UTs**, including Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal.
- The Union Government has committed a central assistance of **₹5,185 crore** for these specific projects.
- This latest sanction brings the cumulative number of houses approved under **PMAY-U 2.0** to **10.33 lakh** across 23 States/UTs.

Implementation of PMAY-U 2.0

- **Objective:** To address the housing requirement of **1 crore** urban poor and middle-class families by providing all-weather pucca houses.

- **Financial Outlay:** The mission involves a total investment of ₹10 lakh crore, supported by a central subsidy of ₹2.3 lakh crore.
- **Target Beneficiaries:** Focuses on **Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Low Income Groups (LIG), and Middle Income Groups (MIG).**
- **Implementation Verticals:**
 - **Beneficiary Led Construction (BLC):** Financial aid to individual families to construct new houses on their own land.
 - **Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP):** Housing projects developed in collaboration with private sectors or public agencies.
 - **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHC):** Provision of rental housing for urban migrants and the poor.
 - **Interest Subsidy Scheme (ISS):** Provides interest subvention on home loans for eligible urban households.

Social Inclusion Metrics

- **Women Empowerment:** Over **1.60 lakh houses** allotted to women (including widows, separated/unmarried women)
 - Overall, **96% houses** under PMAY-U 2.0 are in the name of female head or joint ownership (BLC & ISS verticals)
- **Transgender Community:** **8 dwelling units** sanctioned
- **Senior Citizens:** **22,581 houses**
- **SC Beneficiaries:** **35,525 houses** (22% of total sanctions)
- **ST Beneficiaries:** **9,773 houses** (5% of total sanctions)
- **OBC Beneficiaries:** **82,190 houses**

Cumulative Progress (PMAY-Urban: 2015-2022 & 2.0)

- **Total Houses Sanctioned:** **122.50 lakh**
- **Houses Grounded:** **115.31 lakh**
- **Houses Completed:** **97.20 lakh**
- **Central Assistance Released:** **₹1.77 lakh crore**
- **Total Investment:** **₹8.45 lakh crore**

Additional Information

- **Historical Context:**
 - **PMAY-U 1.0** was launched in **2015** with a target to complete by **2022**.
 - **PMAY-U 2.0** is the **revised and extended version** to address remaining urban housing gaps.
- **Related Initiatives:**
 - **AMRUT Mission** (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation)
 - **Smart Cities Mission**
 - **Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban**
 - All operate under **MoHUA** for integrated urban development.
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 243W:** Empowers **Urban Local Bodies** for planning and development including housing.
 - **Directive Principles (Article 47):** State's duty to raise living standards including housing.

Union Cabinet Approves Renaming Kerala as 'Keralam'

What's the News?

The **Union Cabinet** approved the proposal to rename the state of **Kerala** to '**Keralam**'. The decision aligns with the state's name in **Malayalam**, the official language. The proposal will now require **parliamentary approval** through a constitutional amendment bill, as renaming a state requires an amendment to **Schedule 1** of the **Constitution of India**. The state government had previously passed a unanimous resolution in the **Kerala Assembly** in **2023** requesting the name change.

Linguistic and Historical Roots

- **Etymology:** The name '**Keralam**' derives from two Malayalam words:
 - '**Kera**' (coconut tree)
 - '**Alam**' (region/land)
- **Meaning:** "Land of Coconut Trees" – reflecting the state's abundant coconut cultivation
- **Historical Usage:** The name '**Keralam**' has been used in **Malayalam literature** and historical texts for centuries, while '**Kerala**' is the **anglicized version** used during and after British colonial rule
- **Cultural Significance:** The change represents **linguistic decolonization** and restoration of indigenous identity

Constitutional and Legal Procedure

Step	Requirement	Status
State Assembly Resolution	Unanimous resolution requesting name change	✅ Completed (2023)
Union Cabinet Approval	Central government approval	✅ Completed
Parliamentary Amendment	Constitutional amendment bill passed by both houses	⌚ Pending
Presidential Assent	President's signature on amendment	⌚ Pending

- **Constitutional Basis:** **Article 3** of the Constitution empowers Parliament to alter state names
- **Schedule 1:** Contains the names of all states and UTs; requires amendment for any name change
- **Precedents:**
 - **Madras → Tamil Nadu (1969)**
 - **Mysore → Karnataka (1973)**
 - **Bombay → Maharashtra (1960)**
 - **Orissa → Odisha (2011)**

Constitutional Provisions for State Reorganization

- **Article 3:** Parliament may by law:
 - Form a new state by separation of territory
 - Increase or diminish the area of any state
 - Alter the boundaries of any state
 - Alter the name of any state

- **Process:** Bill must be referred to the **Legislature of the state** concerned for expressing views (not binding on Parliament)

Linguistic Reorganization of States

- **States Reorganization Act, 1956:** Redrew state boundaries based on linguistic lines
- **First Linguistic State: Andhra Pradesh** (formed **1953**)
- **Current Linguistic States:** 28 states largely organized on linguistic basis

Rail Tech Policy Launched to Drive Innovation; Railway Claims Tribunal Goes Fully Digital

What's the News?

Union Railway Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw** announced two major reforms under the "**52 Reforms in 52 Weeks**" initiative:

- **Rail Tech Policy & Portal:** A dedicated platform to engage **startups, innovators, industry, and institutions** for technology-driven solutions in Indian Railways. The government will fund **up to 50% of development costs** for approved projects.
- **e-RCT System:** Complete digitisation of the **Railway Claims Tribunal (RCT)**, enabling end-to-end online filing, processing, and adjudication of claims across all **23 RCT benches** in India within the next 12 months.

Rail Tech Policy?

Overview: The policy creates a structured, simplified ecosystem for technology adoption in railways, moving away from rigid vendor selection to an innovation-driven framework modeled on the **Defence Ministry's iDEX initiative**.

Features:

- **Single-stage proposal submission** through the **Rail Tech Portal** (open permanently for startups)
- **Funding structure:** Up to **50% government funding** for development; substantial long-term orders for successful solutions
- **Enhanced grants:** Scale-up grant increased **more than 3x**; prototype development grant **doubled** compared to the 2022 Indian Railway Innovation Policy
- **Focus:**
 - **AI-based Elephant Intrusion Detection System (EIDS)**
 - **AI fire detection** in coaches
 - **Drone-based broken rail detection**
 - **Rail stress monitoring** systems
 - **AI-enabled CCTV** for passenger security
 - **Predictive maintenance** for overhead electrical equipment
 - **AI-based pension and dispute resolution** systems
 - **Solar panels on coaches** and sensor-based load calculation devices

Significance:

- Addresses legacy challenges in **safety, maintenance, and administrative efficiency**
- Creates a **transparent, digital-only, end-to-end process** removing procedural bottlenecks

- Potential **template for other sectors** if successful
- Successful innovators can target **export markets** post-validation

e-RCT (Electronic Railway Claims Tribunal)?

Overview: Complete **AI-enabled digitisation** of the Railway Claims Tribunal to transform claims processing from physical to paperless, ensuring faster disposal and nationwide accessibility.

Features:

- **24x7 e-filing:** Claims can be filed online from anywhere, eliminating jurisdiction confusion for passengers traveling across states
- **End-to-end computerisation:** Digital case filing, document submission, and real-time case tracking
- **Hybrid hearings:** Online hearings and instant access to orders
- **Paperless courts:** Eliminates need for physical visits to Tribunal offices
- **Centralised case management** across all 23 RCT benches

Significance:

- **Reduces delays** and procedural hurdles for accident victims and litigants
- **Improves transparency** and accessibility for aggrieved passengers
- Addresses compensation claims for:
 - Death or injury in railway accidents/untoward incidents
 - Loss or non-delivery of goods
 - Refund of fares and freight

Additional Info

- **Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO):**
 - Functions as the R&D wing of the **Ministry of Railways**.
 - Under the new policy, RDSO's role will evolve from being the sole developer to acting as a standard-setter and facilitator for private innovators.
- **National Rail Plan (NRP) 2030:**
 - The policy is a core component of the NRP, which aims to create a 'future-ready' railway system.
 - A primary goal of the NRP is to increase the modal share of Railways in freight transport from the current **27% to 45%** by 2030.
- **Kavach System:**
 - The indigenous **Automatic Train Protection (ATP)** system.
 - The Rail Tech Policy will expedite the R&D required to scale **Kavach** across the entire Indian Rail network.

India Mandates Nationwide E20 Fuel with RON 95 Standard

What's the News?

- The Government of India has mandated the nationwide sale of **E20 petrol** (a blend of 20% ethanol and 80% petrol) across all fuel retail outlets.

- A significant technical upgrade accompanies this mandate: the minimum fuel quality standard has been raised to **RON 95** (Research Octane Number).
- The move is designed to enhance engine performance, reduce the carbon footprint of the transport sector, and significantly cut down on crude oil import bills.
- The transition is set to be fully implemented by the start of the **2026-27 financial year**.

E20 Petrol & RON 95 Standard

What is E20?

- **Composition:** 20% ethanol + 80% petrol
- **Feedstock:** Ethanol produced from **sugarcane, maize, and surplus grains**
- **Nature:** Renewable, domestically manufactured, cleaner-burning fuel

Why RON 95?

- **Research Octane Number (RON)** measures fuel's resistance to **engine knocking** (pre-ignition that causes power loss and engine damage)
- **Ethanol's natural octane rating:** ~108 RON
- **Benefit:** Higher octane provides better combustion stability, particularly for modern high-compression and turbocharged engines
- **Protection:** Prevents engine damage while enabling higher ethanol content

Vehicle Compatibility & Consumer Impact

E20-Ready Vehicles

- Most vehicles manufactured **2023-2025 onwards** are engineered for E20 compatibility
- **Benefits:** Improved acceleration, smoother driving performance, better knock resistance
- Warranties remain valid for E20-compatible models

Older Vehicles (Pre-2020)

- **Mileage impact:** 3-7% reduction in fuel efficiency due to ethanol's lower energy density
- **Component wear:** Potential degradation of rubber seals, gaskets, and plastic fuel system parts
- **Mitigation:** E20 conversion kits available from manufacturers like **Royal Enfield** for BS3/BS4 vehicles
- **Recommendation:** Owners should consult authorized service centers for compatibility assessment

Programme Timeline & Progress

Milestone	Achievement
June 2022	10% ethanol blending achieved (5 months ahead of schedule)
Original Target	20% blending by 2030
Revised Target	Advanced to 2025-26 following early success
Current Status	Most fuel stations already supplying E20; blending levels reached ~ 18% by February 2025
Effective Date	April 1, 2026 (mandatory nationwide)

Production Capacity & Infrastructure

Ethanol Production Capacity (as of September 2024):

- **Total installed capacity: 1,528 crore litres**
 - Grain-based distilleries: 605 crore litres

- Molasses-based distilleries: 923 crore litres
- **Target capacity by 2025: 1,700 crore litres** (to achieve 20% blending)

Interest Subvention Scheme:

- **6% interest subvention** or 50% of bank interest rate (whichever is lower) for 5 years
- **1,212 projects approved** (590 molasses-based, 474 grain-based, 148 dual-feed)
- Covers new distilleries, expansion, and Zero Liquid Discharge (**ZLD**) systems

NITI Aayog Proposes National Apprenticeship Mission to Revamp Skilling Ecosystem

What's the News?

NITI Aayog released a comprehensive policy report titled "*Revitalizing Apprenticeship Ecosystem: Insights, Challenges, Recommendations and Best Practices*" to transform India's apprenticeship landscape. The report outlines **20 action-oriented recommendations** across five pillars: policy reforms, structural strengthening, state-district interventions, industry engagement, and aspirant support. It positions apprenticeships as a strategic pillar for achieving **Viksit Bharat @2047** by converting India's demographic potential into economic productivity.

Current Apprenticeship Landscape

- **Growth Trajectory:** Active engagements under **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS)** grew **27-fold** from 2018-19, reaching **9.85 lakh** in FY 2024-25.
- **Establishment Base:** **51,133** active establishments currently participate under NAPS.
- **Completion Challenge:** Completion rates stand at only **25.47%**, with dropout rates as high as **35.46%**.
- **Regional Concentration:** **Gujarat** dominates with **24.18%** of total engagements; industrially advanced states (Maharashtra, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka) hold bulk of participation while many states/UTs contribute less than **0.001%**.
- **Gender Gap:** Women participation remains low at approximately **20%**.

Recommendations

Institutional Reforms

- Establish **National Apprenticeship Mission (NAM)** for unified governance.
- Create single **National Apprenticeship Portal** consolidating existing fragmented systems.
- Introduce **Apprenticeship Engagement Index** to benchmark state-wise performance.
- Align with **National Credit Framework (NCrF)** and **NEP 2020** for seamless education-skilling mobility.

Industry & MSME Focus

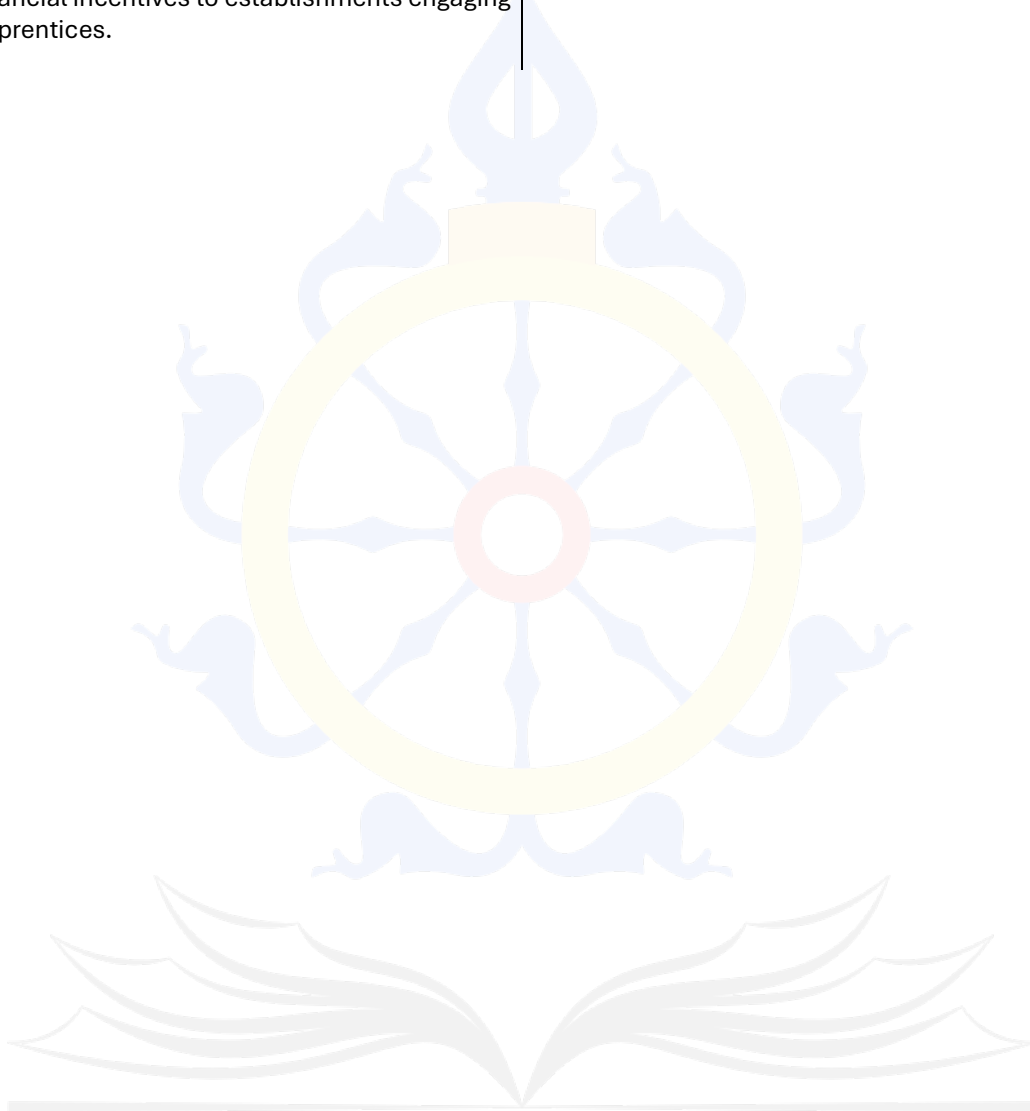
- Launch **Apprenticeship-Linked Incentive Scheme (ALIS)** targeting aspirational districts, North Eastern states, and women apprentices.
- Promote **Startup Apprenticeship Programme (SAP)**.
- Enable cluster-based consortia for **MSMEs** to share training costs.

- Expand apprenticeships into **gig and platform economy**.
- Relax threshold limits beyond current **Apprenticeship Act, 1961** mandate (establishments with 30+ employees must engage 2.5%-15% apprentices).

Additional Info

- **Legislative Background:**
 - **Apprentices Act, 1961:** The primary legislation governing apprenticeship training in India. It was significantly amended in **2014** to make it more industry-friendly.
- **Existing Schemes:**
 - **NAPS (National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme):** Launched in **2016** to provide financial incentives to establishments engaging apprentices.

- **NATS (National Apprenticeship Training Scheme):** Focused on graduate, diploma, and certificate holders, managed by the **Ministry of Education**.
-



Denotified Tribes Demand Separate Census Column and Constitutional Recognition

What's the News?

- **Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)** across India are demanding a **separate column and code** in the upcoming **2027 caste Census**, arguing that current classification within **SC, ST, and OBC** categories obscures their distinct identity and needs.
- The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has recommended their inclusion to the **Office of the Registrar General of India**, which has agreed in principle to include them in the caste enumeration exercise.
- Community leaders emphasize that without a **distinct Census category**, DNTs risk being "statistically erased" and unable to access targeted welfare schemes.

Who Are Denotified Tribes?

- **Historical Context:** Communities branded as "**criminal tribes**" under the colonial **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871**, which notified entire groups as addicted to crime by birth. The Act was **repealed in 1952**, and communities were officially "**denotified**".
- **Current Status:** Known as **Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)**, comprising approximately **1,200 communities** identified by the **Idate Commission (2017)**.
- **Livelihoods:** Historically dependent on **pastoralism, salt trading, acrobatics, snake charming, transport services, and artisanal work**.
- **Population:** No reliable national data exists; estimates suggest **7 crore in Uttar Pradesh alone**, with **267 communities remaining unclassified** under any constitutional category.

Challenges Faced

- **Administrative Invisibility:**
 - Many lack **caste certificates, domicile records, or land titles**, limiting access to welfare schemes.
 - **SEED scheme** (Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs) saw only **₹69.3 crore spent** against a **₹200 crore allocation (2020–2025)** due to states not issuing DNT certificates.
- **Social Exclusion:**
 - Persistent stigma of "criminality" continues in policing through the **Habitual Offenders framework**.
 - Extreme educational deprivation—some communities report **zero members completing Class 10**.
- **Political Misclassification:**
 - Most DNTs absorbed into **SC, ST, or OBC lists** where they cannot compete with relatively advanced groups.

- Communities trapped in categories that do not reflect their cultural identity or level of deprivation.

Demands and Significance

- **Separate Constitutional Schedule:** Demand for recognition on par with **SCs and STs**, acknowledging unique historical injustice distinct from caste-based discrimination.
- **Sub-classification Within DNTs:** Recognition of "**graded backwardness**" between settled and nomadic DNTs, drawing from the **Supreme Court's August 2024 judgment** allowing sub-classification within reserved categories.
- **Accurate Enumeration:** First-time reliable population data to strengthen basis for **targeted welfare, budgetary allocation, and political representation**.

Additional Info

- **Historical Legislation:**
 - **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871:** Enacted for "registration, surveillance and control of certain criminal tribes and eunuchs"; amended in **1924**.
 - **Repeal:** Officially repealed on **August 31, 1952**; replaced by the **Habitual Offenders Act**, perpetuating surveillance.
- **Idate Commission (2017):**
 - Identified **1,200 denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities**.
 - Found **267 communities not included** in SC, ST, or OBC classifications.
- **SEED Scheme:**
 - **Launched by:** Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
 - **Covers:** Education, health insurance, housing, and livelihood support.
 - **Implementation Gap:** Low utilization due to absence of proper DNT certificates issued by States/UTs.
- **Constitutional Context:**
 - **Census 2027:** First caste enumeration since **1931**; preparatory exercise planned by **July 2025**.
 - **Article 341 & 342:** Provide for specification of SCs and STs through Presidential Orders; DNTs seek similar constitutional mechanism.

Rising Cybercrime Trends in India: 24% Spike in 2025

What's the News?

- Data from the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** reveals a **24% spike** in cybercrime cases during 2025, with a total of **28.15 lakh** cases recorded compared to 22.68 lakh in 2024.
- Despite the surge in incidents, total financial losses marginally dipped to **₹22,495 crore** (from ₹22,845 crore

in 2024), attributed to improved real-time intervention by law enforcement.

Statistics & Trends

Financial Impact

- **Total Losses:** ₹22,495 crore (marginally down from ₹22,845 crore in 2024).
- **Investment Scams:** Account for **76% of total money lost** and **35% of all reported cases**.
- **Digital Arrests:** **9%** of total financial losses; **6%** of cases.
- **Sextortion:** **4%** of losses; **19%** of cases.

Case Volume & Enforcement

- **Cases Reported:** **28.15 lakh** (up from 22.68 lakh in 2024).
- **FIRs Filed:** **55,484** (down from 66,370 in 2024).
- **Cyber Police Stations:** **459** (up from 169 in 2020); **Uttar Pradesh** leads with 75 stations.

Prevention Success

- **I4C Interventions:** Blocked fraudulent transactions worth **₹8,031 crore** since inception.
- **Citizen Financial Cyber Fraud Reporting System:** Saved over **₹7,130 crore** across **23.02 lakh complaints**.
- **Mule Account Registry:** Banks shared **18.43 lakh suspect identifiers** and **24.67 lakh mule bank accounts**.

Emerging Threat Patterns

Investment Fraud Dominance

- Includes **Ponzi schemes, fake stock market trading apps, cryptocurrency scams**.
- Driven by desire for quick returns and easy money amid economic pressures.
- Targets both urban investors and first-time digital users in Tier-2/3 cities.

Psychological Manipulation Crimes

- **Digital Arrest Scams:** Fraudsters impersonate law enforcement via video calls using **AI-generated uniforms** and simulated police station backgrounds.
- **Sextortion:** Fastest-growing category exploiting social stigma to prevent immediate reporting

Cross-Border Operations

- Over **50% of cyber frauds** targeting Indians originate from **Southeast Asian cyber-slave compounds** in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos.
- Organized criminal networks operating from high-security compounds.

Structural Challenges

Investigation Barriers

- **Low FIR Conversion:** Only **55,484 FIRs** filed from 28.15 lakh reported cases due to jurisdictional complexity.
- **Jurisdictional Hurdles:** Crimes committed across multiple states (e.g., scam operated from Delhi using mule accounts in Kerala and SIM cards from West Bengal).
- **Technical Sophistication:** Criminals use **VPNs, encrypted communications, and Ransomware-as-a-Service models** hampering traceability.

Capacity Constraints

- **Forensic Talent Gap:** Shortage of trained cyber forensic experts at station level.

- **Digital Evidence Backlog:** Delays in mirroring and analyzing seized devices despite increased police station numbers.

User Vulnerability

- **Rapid UPI Adoption:** Security awareness lagging behind digital payment penetration (**86% household internet connectivity** by 2025).
- **Social Stigma:** Victims of sextortion and digital arrests delay reporting due to embarrassment.

World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2026 Report

What's the News?

The **World Bank** released its **Women, Business and the Law (WBL) 2026** report, revealing that while legal frameworks for women's economic participation have improved globally, **implementation gaps persist**. The report assesses **190 economies** across **8 indicators** measuring laws affecting women's economic opportunities. **India scored 74.4 out of 100**, ranking below the **South Asian average** and **OECD high-income average**.

Global Findings

- **Legal Reforms:** **18 economies** enacted **30 reforms** in the past year to improve women's economic inclusion
- **Implementation Gap:** Laws on paper are only **half enforced** globally
- **Best Performers:** **Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden** (all scored **100**)
- **Worst Performers:** **Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen, West Bank and Gaza** (scored **0**)
- **Regional Leader:** **OECD high-income economies** average **95.6 points**

India's Performance

Indicator	India's Score	Maximum Score	Gap
Mobility	100	100	✅ None
Workplace	50	100	❌ 50 points
Pay	50	100	❌ 50 points
Marriage	80	100	❌ 20 points
Parenthood	40	100	❌ 60 points
Entrepreneurship	100	100	✅ None
Assets	80	100	❌ 20 points
Pension	100	100	✅ None
Overall	74.4	100	Below regional average

Key Weaknesses for India

- **Workplace Laws:**
 - No laws prohibiting **discrimination in employment based on gender**
 - No **right to equal remuneration** for work of equal value (only "same work" covered)
 - No **paid leave for 16+ weeks** for maternity (currently **26 weeks** but with coverage gaps)
- **Pay Transparency:**
 - No requirement for **pay audits** or **gender pay gap reporting** by private sector employers
- **Parenthood:**
 - **No paternity leave** provisions
 - No **paid parental leave** (only maternity leave exists)
 - **No childcare support** mandates for employers
- **Marriage & Assets:**
 - **Unequal inheritance rights** in certain personal laws
 - **Marital rape** not criminalized

South Asia Comparison

Country	Score	Rank
India	74.4	Below average
Sri Lanka	80.0	Regional leader
Nepal	77.5	Above India
Bangladesh	74.4	Equal to India
Pakistan	58.8	Below India
Afghanistan	0.0	Lowest globally
Regional Average	64.4	India above average

Additional Info

WBL 2026 Methodology

- **8 Indicators:** Mobility, Workplace, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Entrepreneurship, Assets, Pension
- **Data Collection:** Based on **laws and regulations** (not practice or outcomes)
- **Scoring:** **0, 50, or 100** points per indicator based on legal provisions
- **New Additions:** **Safety** and **Childcare** indicators to be introduced in **WBL 2027**

India's Legal Framework

- **Constitutional Provisions:**
 - **Article 14:** Right to equality
 - **Article 15(3):** Special provisions for women and children
 - **Article 39(d):** Equal pay for equal work
 - **Article 42:** Humane conditions of work and maternity relief
- **Key Legislation:**
 - **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961** (amended **2017**): **26 weeks** paid leave
 - **Equal Remuneration Act, 1976:** Equal pay for "same work"
 - **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013**
 - **Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005:** Equal coparcenary rights

Global Reform Trends

- **Paternity Leave: 40+ economies** introduced paid paternity leave
- **Pay Transparency: 20+ economies** mandated gender pay gap reporting
- **Domestic Violence: 10+ economies** strengthened protections
- **Entrepreneurship:** Removal of **gender-based restrictions** on business registration

World Bank Recommendations

- **Strengthen Implementation:** Laws must be backed by **enforcement mechanisms**
- **Close Gaps:** Address **legal barriers** in marriage, parenthood, and workplace
- **Data Collection:** Improve **gender-disaggregated data** for policy-making
- **Private Sector Engagement:** Encourage **voluntary commitments** beyond legal compliance

Indian Youth Rank 60th in Global Mental Well-being Study

What's the News?

- According to the **Global Mind Health in 2025** report released by **Sapien Labs**, young Indian adults (aged 18–34) are facing a significant mental health crisis, ranking **60th among 84 nations**.
- The study highlights a sharp **generational divide**, with older Indians reporting much higher levels of mental well-being compared to the youth.
- The findings emphasize that the decline is a "structural, multi-year generational shift" driven by modern lifestyle factors rather than a temporary post-pandemic effect.

The Global Mind Health Report?

- **Metric Used:** The study uses the **Mind Health Quotient (MHQ)**, which aggregates 47 parameters across six dimensions: **Mood & Outlook, Social Self, Adaptability & Resilience, Drive & Motivation, Cognition, and Mind-Body Connection**.
- **India's Performance:**
 - **Young Adults (18–34):** Recorded an average MHQ score of **33**, placing them in the bottom third of the global rankings.
 - **Seniors (55+ years):** Scored **96**, ranking 49th globally and aligning with functional mental health norms.
- **Mental Functioning:** The report identifies a decline in "core mental functioning," which includes the ability to regulate emotions, maintain focus, and build stable relationships, rather than just an increase in clinical diagnoses.
- **Economic Impact:** Experts note that **MHQ** is linearly related to **productivity**, suggesting that declining mental health among youth could significantly impact India's future economic resilience.

Drivers of Declining Well-being?

- **Digital Addiction:** The average age for first smartphone exposure in India is **16.5 years**. Early and frequent use is linked to higher mental health risks and reduced peer social capital.

- **Dietary Habits:**
 - **44%** of young Indians regularly consume **Ultra-processed food (UPF)**, compared to only **11%** of those aged 55+.
 - High UPF intake is scientifically associated with diminished emotional and cognitive resilience.
- **Weakened Social Ties:** Only **64%** of young adults reported being close to their families, a notable drop from **78%** among the older generation.
- **Reduced Spirituality:** Lower scores in spirituality and sense of purpose among youth were identified as factors reducing their "protective cultural buffer."

Government Initiatives & Policy Response

Existing Framework

- **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP):** Operational since 1982, focuses on community-based mental healthcare.
- **Mental Healthcare Act 2017:** Ensures right to mental healthcare and decriminalizes suicide.
- **District Mental Health Programme (DMHP):** Extends services to district-level facilities.

Budget 2026 Announcements

- **NIMHANS-2:** New all-India institute of mental health sciences proposed for **North India**.
- **50% increase** in district-level mental health facilities announced.
- Enhanced funding for **tele-mental health services** under **Tele-MANAS** initiative.

Related Programmes

- **Tele-MANAS:** 24/7 toll-free mental health helpline (14416).
- **Kiran Helpline:** Crisis intervention and psychological support.
- **Manodarpan Initiative:** Mental health support for students and educators.

Additional Information

Constitutional & Legal Framework

- **Article 21:** Right to Health interpreted as part of Right to Life includes mental health.
- **Article 47:** Directive Principle for improving public health and nutrition.
- **Mental Healthcare Act 2017:**
 - Recognizes mental health as integral to overall health.
 - Ensures confidentiality and informed consent.
 - Prohibits discrimination against persons with mental illness.

International Commitments

- **Sustainable Development Goal 3.4:** Reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases and promote mental health by 2030.
- **WHO Mental Health Action Plan:** India aligns with global targets for mental health service coverage.

Statistics

- **Treatment Gap:** Over **70% of mental health cases** remain untreated in India.
- **Suicide Rates:** India accounts for significant proportion of global suicide deaths among youth.
- **Workforce:** Less than **1 psychiatrist per 100,000 population** in India.

Culture and Arts

68th Annual Grammy Awards: Bad Bunny, Kendrick Lamar & SZA Win Big

What's the News?

The **68th Annual Grammy Awards** were held on **February 1, 2026**, at the **Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles**, hosted by **Trevor Noah** for the fifth consecutive year. **Kendrick Lamar** led nominations with **9 nods**, followed by **Lady Gaga, Cirkut, and Jack Antonoff** with **7 each**. **Bad Bunny** won **Album of the Year** for *DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS*, **Kendrick Lamar & SZA** won **Record of the Year** for *Luther*, **Billie Eilish** won **Song of the Year** for *Wildflower*, and **Olivia Dean** won **Best New Artist**. Indian fusion band **Shakti** was nominated for **Best Global Music Album** for *This Moment*.

Major Winners?

Category	Winner	Work
Album of the Year	Bad Bunny	<i>DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS</i>
Record of the Year	Kendrick Lamar & SZA	<i>Luther</i>
Song of the Year	Billie Eilish	<i>Wildflower</i>
Best New Artist	Olivia Dean	—
Best Pop Vocal Album	Lady Gaga	<i>MAYHEM</i>
Best Pop Solo Performance	Lola Young	<i>Messy</i>
Best Pop Duo/Group Performance	Cynthia Erivo & Ariana Grande	<i>Defying Gravity</i>
Best Rap Album	Kendrick Lamar	<i>GNX</i>
Best Música Urbana Album	Bad Bunny	<i>DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS</i>
Best Dance Pop Recording	Lady Gaga	<i>Abracadabra</i>
Best R&B Performance	Kehlani	<i>Folded</i>
Best Contemporary Country Album	Jelly Roll	<i>Beautifully Broken</i>

Indian Representation?

- Shakti** (Indian fusion band featuring **Zakir Hussain**) was nominated for **Best Global Music Album** for *This Moment*.
- This marks continued international recognition for Indian classical music fusion following previous Indian Grammy winners and nominees.
- The nomination highlights the growing global appreciation for Indian traditional music blended with contemporary jazz and world music elements.

Key Performers & Presenters?

- Sabrina Carpenter** was announced as the **first performer** on January 20, 2026.
- All eight nominees for Best New Artist** performed.
- Justin Bieber** performed with **in memoriam** tribute artists.
- Lady Gaga, Rosé, Tyler, The Creator, and Bruno Mars** were among the performers.
- Presenters: Harry Styles, Doechii, Chappell Roan, Teyana Taylor, Karol G, and others.**

Ancient Indian Inscriptions Discovered in Egypt's Valley of the Kings

What's the News?

- Researchers have identified nearly **30 inscriptions** in **Tamil Brahmi, Sanskrit, and Prakrit** inside six tombs at Egypt's **Valley of the Kings**, dating to the **1st–3rd centuries CE**.
- The discovery by **Charlotte Schmid** (École Française d'Extrême-Orient) and **Ingo Strauch** (University of Lausanne) reveals that Indian traders traveled far inland from Red Sea ports, participating in ancient Mediterranean commemorative practices.
- The name "**Cikai Korraṇ**" appears **eight times across five tombs**, indicating repeated visits by a prominent Tamil merchant or leader.

Discoveries and Inscriptions

The Repeated Name: Cikai Korraṇ

- Frequency:** Inscribed **eight times** across five different tombs, including one placed prominently **four metres high** at an entrance.
- Linguistic Significance:**
 - "**Cikai**": Possibly derived from Sanskrit **śikhā** (tuft or crown).
 - "**Korraṇ**": Distinctly Tamil, linked to victory/slaying and associated with **Korraṇvai** (Chera warrior goddess) and **korraṇ** (king).
- Cultural Hybridity:** The name straddles Sanskrit and Tamil worlds, reflecting cosmopolitan merchant communities.

Other Identified Names

- "**Kopāṇ varata kantaṇ**": "**Kopāṇ** came and saw" mirrors Greek graffiti formulae found in the same tombs.
- Cātaṇ** and **Kiraṇ**: Common Tamil names attested in South Indian inscriptions.
- Kshaharata Envoy:** One Sanskrit inscription mentions an envoy of a **Kshaharata king** (western Indian dynasty, 1st century CE) who "came here."

Language Distribution

Language	Count	Origin Region
Tamil Brahmi	~20	Tamilagam (South India)
Sanskrit	Multiple	Pan-Indian/North India

Language	Count	Origin Region
Prakrit	Multiple	Western/Northwestern India
Gandhari-Kharosthi	Few	Northwest India

Historical Context

The Valley of the Kings

- **Location:** West bank of the Nile near modern **Luxor** (ancient Thebes), part of the **Theban Necropolis**.
- **Period:** Built during **18th–20th Dynasties** (c. 1539–1075 BCE) for New Kingdom pharaohs.
- **UNESCO Status:** Designated World Heritage Site in **1979** as part of Ancient Thebes.
- **Roman-Era Tourism:** By the 1st–3rd centuries CE, the site had become an ancient tourist destination where Mediterranean travelers left graffiti.

Indo-Roman Trade Networks

- **Maritime Routes:** Connected Indian Ocean ports (Arikamedu, Muziris) with Red Sea ports (Berenike, Myos Hormos).
- **Goods Traded:** Pepper, ivory, gemstones, textiles flowed westward; wine, glass, gold flowed eastward.
- **Previous Evidence:** Indian inscriptions at Berenike since the 1990s, including pottery sherd with "Korrapumān" linking to the same naming tradition.

Ol Chiki Script Marks Centenary: President Murmu Inaugurates National Celebrations

What's the News?

- **President Droupadi Murmu** inaugurated the **centenary celebrations of the Ol Chiki script** at a national event organised by the **Ministry of Culture** in New Delhi.
- The celebrations mark **100 years (1925–2025)** since the script's invention by **Pandit Raghunath Murmu**, a scholar from **Rairangpur, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha**.
- On the occasion, the President released a **commemorative coin and postage stamp** and felicitated **10 achievers** from the Santal community for promoting the script.

Ol Chiki Script and Its Significance?

Origins and Creation

- **Inventor:** **Pandit Raghunath Murmu** (1905–1982), born in **Dandbose village, Mayurbhanj district, Odisha**.
- **Year of Invention:** **1925** (first publicised in 1939 at Mayurbhanj State exhibition)
- **Etymology:** Derived from Santali words – '**Ol**' (to write/draw an imaginary picture) and '**Chiki**' (pictorial representation/symbols).
- **Philosophy:** Murmu believed *"if a community doesn't have any script, the community may lose its own identity one day"*.

Linguistic Features

- **Script Type:** **True alphabet** (not an abugida like most Indic scripts), giving vowels equal representation with consonants.
- **Character Set:** **30 letters** total – **6 vowels** and **24 consonants**.

- **Design Principle: Pictographic-phonetic** – letter shapes resemble objects or actions representing their names in Santali.
 - Example: The letter '**ol**' (/l/ sound) is shaped like a hand holding a pen, as '**ol**' means 'writing' in Santali.
- **Writing Direction:** Left-to-right.
- **Scientific Approach:** Designed to accurately represent Santali phonemes (including glottalization, nasalization, and checked plosives) that Indic scripts cannot capture.

Historical Context

- **Pre-Ol Chiki Era:** Santali was written in **Roman, Devanagari, Odia, and Bengali scripts** in different regions; these could not accurately capture Santali phonetics.
- **Development Journey:** Murmu developed the script while teaching at **Badamtalia Primary School** (1933), first book '**Horh Sereng**' published in 1936, first play '**Bidu-Chandan**' in 1942.
- **Recognition:** Conferred the title '**Guru Gomke**' (the great teacher) by **Jaipal Singh Munda** at the 1956 All India Sarna Conference.

Constitutional and Educational Status?

- **Eighth Schedule Inclusion:** Santali language included in the **Eighth Schedule of the Constitution** through the **92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003** – first tribal language from eastern India to achieve this status.
- **State Recognition:** Official recognition in **Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and Bihar**; introduced as medium of instruction at primary and high school levels in Santal-dominated areas.
- **University Education:** Courses in Santali literature using Ol Chiki script offered at universities in **Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha**.
- **Unicode Standard:** Script included in Unicode, facilitating digital representation and modern communication.
- **Optional Holiday:** Odisha government declared **Guru Purnima** (full moon day in May, Murmu's birth anniversary) as an optional holiday in 2016.

Cultural and Literary Impact?

- **Community Identity:** Ol Chiki serves as a **powerful symbol of Santal identity** worldwide and an effective means of establishing unity among the Santal community.
- **Literary Corpus:** Murmu authored over **150 plays, short stories, novels, and poems** in Ol Chiki, including:
 - **Bidu-Chandan** (love drama)
 - **Kherwal Bir** (patriotic drama)
 - **Sido Kanhu** (patriotic drama)
 - **Hital** (scripture on evolution)
 - **Ol Chemed** (primary learning syllabus)
 - **Parsi Poha** (essential elements of Ol Chiki)
- **Religious Significance:** Characters **Bidu and Chandan** from Murmu's plays are worshipped as '**God of Knowledge**' by some Santals; annual prayers offered at the confluence of **Jual and Bhangra rivers** near Jhargram.

Additional Info

Demographics and Geographical Spread

- **Speaker Population:** Approximately **7 million people** in India.
- **Primary States:** **Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Assam.**
- **International Presence:** Significant Santali-speaking populations in **Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.**
- **Language Family:** **Munda branch of Austroasiatic language family** (distinct from Indo-Aryan languages).
- **Linguistic Features:** Agglutinative structure with tonal elements; rich oral literature preserving history, ecology, and social values.

Institutional Recognition

- **Sahitya Akademi:** Recognises Santali literature; annual awards given for literary contributions.
- **Educational Infrastructure:** **Pandit Raghunath Murmu Medical College and Hospital** (Mayurbhanj), **Nayagram Pandit Raghunath Murmu Government College** (Jhargram), and other institutions named after the inventor.
- **Cultural Organisations:** **Adivasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association (ASECA)** established by Murmu in 1953 to promote tribal education and culture.

Constitutional Framework for Minority Languages

- **Article 29:** Protection of interests of minorities (right to conserve distinct language, script, or culture).
- **Article 30:** Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
- **Article 350A:** Facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage.
- **Article 351:** Directive for development of Hindi while safeguarding other languages.

Related Tribal Scripts in India

- **Kui Lipi:** For Kondh community (Odisha).
- **Sorang Sompeng:** For Saura community (Odisha).
- **Mundari Bani:** For Bhumij community (Odisha).
- Ol Chiki remains the **oldest and most widely adopted** among indigenous scripts developed in eastern India.

79th British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA 2026)

What's the News?

- The **79th BAFTA Film Awards** were held on **February 22, 2026**, at the **Royal Festival Hall in London**, hosted by **Alan Cumming**.
- The ceremony saw a mix of historic milestones for Indian cinema and dominant sweeps by major Hollywood productions.
- **One Battle After Another**, a politically charged thriller directed by **Paul Thomas Anderson**, emerged as the night's biggest winner, securing **six awards** including **Best Film**.

Historic Moment for India

- **Boong Wins Big:** The Manipuri-language film **Boong**, backed by **Farhan Akhtar's Excel Entertainment** and directed by **Lakshmipriya Devi**, made history by

winning **Best Children's and Family Film**. It notably beat global giants like Disney's *Zootopia 2*.

Major Winners and Highlights

Category	Winner	Film
Best Film	Paul Thomas Anderson (Dir.)	<i>One Battle After Another</i>
Outstanding British Film	Chloé Zhao (Dir.)	<i>Hamnet</i>
Leading Actor	Robert Aramayo	<i>I Swear</i>
Leading Actress	Jessie Buckley	<i>Hamnet</i>
Best Director	Paul Thomas Anderson	<i>One Battle After Another</i>
Best Supporting Actor	Sean Penn	<i>One Battle After Another</i>
Best Supporting Actress	Wunmi Mosaku	<i>Sinners</i>
EE Rising Star Award	Robert Aramayo	<i>(Public Vote)</i>

Additional Information

- **BAFTA Overview:**
 - **Full Form:** **British Academy of Film and Television Arts**
 - **Established:** **1947** as independent arts charity.
 - **Annual Ceremony:** Held every year in **London, United Kingdom**
 - **Prestige:** Considered **second most prestigious** film awards after Oscars.
- **Indian Cinema at International Awards:**
 - **RRR (2023):** Won **Oscar for Best Original Song** ('Naatu Naatu')
 - **Gandhi (1982):** Won **8 Oscars** including Best Picture
 - **Salaam Bombay (1988):** Won **Cannes Camera d'Or**
 - **Lagaan (2001):** **Oscar nominee** for Best Foreign Language Film

Sulawesi Hand Stencil Identified as World's Oldest Known Rock Art

What's the News?

- Researchers have identified a hand stencil in **Indonesia** as the world's oldest known piece of rock art, dating back at least **67,800 years**.
- The discovery was made in the **Maros-Pangkep** karst region of **Sulawesi** using advanced geochemical dating techniques.
- This finding significantly pushes back the timeline of human artistic expression and symbolic behavior, suggesting that early **Homo sapiens** were creating complex art much earlier than previously documented in Europe.

The Sulawesi Discovery?

- **Location:** The artwork is located in the **Leang Karampuang** cave in South Sulawesi, a region famous for its prehistoric limestone caves.

- **The Artwork:** It consists of a red hand stencil created by blowing mineral pigment (ochre) over a hand pressed against the cave wall.
- **Oldest Figurative Art:** This discovery follows a recent trend in the region; previously, a hunting scene in the same area was dated to **51,200 years**, which was the record-holder until this new analysis.
- **Cultural Shift:** The find challenges the long-held "Eurocentric" view that sophisticated cave art originated in Europe, placing **Southeast Asia** at the center of early human cognitive evolution.

Scientific Methodology?

- **Uranium-Series Imaging:** Scientists used a refined method called **laser-ablation U-series imaging** to date the artwork.
- **Calcium Carbonate Layers:** The technique measures the radioactive decay of **uranium** into **thorium** within the tiny mineral crusts (often called "cave popcorn") that formed over the pigment.
- **Accuracy:** Unlike older methods that required large samples, this laser-based approach allows for high-precision dating of the layers directly in contact with the paint, providing a more accurate minimum age.

Unique Artistic Features

The Claw-Like Motif

- **Technique:** Hand placed against cave wall, pigment sprayed around it (negative stencil).
- **Distinctive modification:** Artist deliberately narrowed finger shapes after creating the outline.
- **Result: Claw-like appearance** — rare in global rock art records.
- **Interpretation:** Possible symbolic linkage between humans and animals; reflects thematic continuity with other early Sulawesi imagery.
- **Continuity:** Similar claw-like motifs appear in Sulawesi cave art until ~20,000 years ago.

Comparative Context

Previous Records

- **Earlier Sulawesi art:** Maros-Pangkep region dated to ~**51,000 years ago** (now exceeded by **16,000+ years**).
- **European Neanderthal art:** Hand stencils in Spain dated to ~**66,000 years ago** (previously considered oldest).
- **Chauvet Cave, France:** Intricate paintings dated **37,000–32,000 years ago** (much later, but more complex).

Evolution of Artistic Tradition

- Early **Homo sapiens** began with hand stencils and progressed to complex narrative scenes.
- Sulawesi evidence shows continuous artistic development from **67,800 years ago** to **20,000 years ago**.
- Suggests rich, enduring cultural traditions in the region.

Additional Info:

- **Human Evolution & Migration:**

- Sulawesi is part of **Wallacea**, a transition zone between the Asian and Australian continental shelves.
- The presence of such old art suggests that the first humans who migrated through these islands toward Australia already possessed advanced cultural and symbolic traits.

- **Archaeology in India (Comparison):**

- **Bhimbetka Rock Shelters:** Located in Madhya Pradesh, this **UNESCO World Heritage Site** contains some of India's oldest rock art.
- While Bhimbetka's art spans from the **Upper Paleolithic** to the Medieval period, the oldest Indian petroglyphs and paintings are generally estimated to be between **10,000 to 40,000 years** old.

Gujarat Becomes India's Largest Renewable Energy Contributor (16.5% Share)

What's the News?

- **Gujarat** has emerged as India's leading state in renewable energy (RE), reaching a cumulative installed capacity of **42.583 GW** as of **December 31, 2025**.
- The state now accounts for **16.5%** of India's total renewable energy capacity, the highest among all states.
- Under the leadership of Chief Minister **Bhupendra Patel**, Gujarat ranks first nationwide in **Wind Power** and **Rooftop Solar** installations, and second in **Solar Power** capacity.
- This milestone supports India's global commitment of achieving **500 GW** of non-fossil fuel capacity by **2030** and becoming **Net Zero** by **2070**.

Key Performance Metrics (As of Dec 2025)

- **Total RE Capacity: 42,583.11 MW** (42.58 GW).
- **Solar Energy: 25,529.40 MW.**
 - **Ground-mounted:** 17,771.21 MW.
 - **Rooftop Solar:** 6,412.80 MW (Over 11 lakh installations).
 - **Hybrid Projects:** 1,172.38 MW.
- **Wind Energy: 14,820.94 MW.**
 - **Kutch District:** The primary hub, contributing **7,476.73 MW** (nearly 50% of the state's wind power).
- **Wind-Solar Hybrid: 2,398.77 MW** commissioned.
- **Agricultural Impact: 12,700** standalone solar water pumps installed under the **PM-KUSUM** scheme.

Major Projects and Policy Initiatives

- **World's Largest RE Park (Khavda):**
 - Located in the Kutch district near the Indo-Pak border, the **Khavda Hybrid Renewable Energy Park** is planned for a total capacity of **30 GW to 37.35 GW**.
 - As of early 2026, it has already achieved an operational capacity of **11.33 GW**.
- **Gujarat Integrated Renewable Energy Policy 2023:**
 - **No Capacity Restrictions:** Removed limits on RE installation relative to a consumer's sanctioned load.
 - **Target 2030:** Aims for **105 GW** of RE capacity and sourcing **50%** of the state's total power from renewables.
 - **Long-term Vision:** Targets **300 GW** of installed RE capacity by **2047**.
- **Digital Governance:** Implementation of the **Akshay Urja Setu** portal for streamlined approvals and "Ease of Doing Business."

Additional Info

- **Leading Districts:**
 - **Wind:** Kutch, Jamnagar, Devbhumi Dwarka, and Rajkot.

- **Solar:** Kutch (Khavda), Patan (Charanka Solar Park - 749 MW), and Banaskantha (Radhanesda - 700 MW).
- **Employment:** The renewable sector has generated an estimated **2.37 lakh** direct and indirect jobs in the state.
- **National Context:**
 - Gujarat contributes over **25%** of India's total rooftop solar capacity.
 - The state was the first in India to launch a dedicated **Wind Power Policy** (1993) and a **Solar Power Policy** (2009).
- **Incentives:**
 - 30-day energy banking allowed for all RE projects.
 - No banking charges for solar power consumed by **residential consumers**.

Delhi Ranks Second Most Polluted City in January; Ghaziabad Tops List

What's the News?

- **Delhi** ranked as the **second most polluted city in India** in January, with a monthly average **PM2.5 concentration of 169 micrograms per cubic metre**, according to an analysis by the **Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA)**.
- **Ghaziabad** recorded the **worst air quality** with an average PM2.5 level of **184 micrograms per cubic metre**, breaching the national daily standard on **all 31 days** of the month.
- The findings highlight persistent **winter air pollution severity** in north India and continued non-compliance with both national and global air quality standards.

Pollution Data and Trends

- **National Standards Breach:** Delhi's PM2.5 levels were nearly **three times higher** than India's **National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)** annual limit of **60 micrograms per cubic metre**.
- **Daily Air Quality Distribution in Delhi:**
 - **24 'Very Poor' days** (AQI 301–400)
 - **3 'Severe' days** (AQI 401–500)
 - **2 'Poor' days** (AQI 201–300)
 - **2 'Moderate' days** (AQI 101–200)
- **National Scenario:** **123 out of 248 cities** monitored recorded monthly average PM2.5 concentrations **above national standards**.
- **WHO Compliance:** **None of the 248 cities** met the **World Health Organization's daily safe guideline of 15 micrograms per cubic metre**.

Top 10 Most Polluted Cities

Besides **Ghaziabad** and **Delhi**, the following cities featured among the ten most polluted:

- **Noida**
- **Gurugram**
- **Greater Noida**
- **Dharuhera**
- **Gangtok**

- Singrauli
- Bhiwadi
- Narnaul

Regional Distribution: Uttar

Pradesh and Haryana accounted for **three cities each** in the top ten, underscoring the **NCR airshed crisis**.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

Performance

- **Non-Attainment Cities:** Of **97 NCAP cities** with sufficient data:
 - **46 cities exceeded India's daily PM2.5 standard**
 - **All 97 cities breached WHO guidelines**
- **Policy Gaps:** Analysis indicates that air quality remained **largely non-compliant** despite programme implementation since **2019**.

Additional Info

- **PM2.5 (Fine Particulate Matter):**
 - **Definition:** Particles with diameter of **2.5 micrometres or less** (about 1/30th width of human hair).
 - **Health Impact:** Penetrates deep into lungs and enters bloodstream, causing **respiratory diseases, cardiovascular conditions, and premature mortality**.
- **Air Quality Index (AQI) Categories (CPCB):**
 - **0–50:** Good
 - **51–100:** Satisfactory
 - **101–200:** Moderate
 - **201–300:** Poor
 - **301–400:** Very Poor
 - **401–500:** Severe
- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):**
 - **Launched: 2019** by **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change**.
 - **Target:** Reduce PM2.5 and PM10 concentrations by **20–30% by 2024** (baseline 2017) in **131 non-attainment cities**.
 - **Current Status:** Extended to **2024–25** with increased funding through **XV Finance Commission grants**.
- **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):**
 - **Established: 2021** for **NCR and adjoining areas**.
 - **Mandate:** Coordinate air quality management across **Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh**.
 - **Powers:** Enforce **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)** measures during pollution episodes.

Government Forms Expert Groups to Upgrade 50-Year-Old Project Tiger

What's the News?

- The **Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** has constituted **four zone-wise expert working groups** to review and modernise **Project Tiger** as the programme completes its **50th anniversary**.

- The groups will assess **28 policy decisions** taken by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** over five decades, evaluate their current relevance, and recommend future-ready policies for the next **25 years**.
- Union Minister **Bhupendra Yadav** announced the initiative during a conference with Chief Wildlife Wardens of Tiger Range States and Field Directors of Tiger Reserves in Alwar.

Project Tiger: Overview & Achievements

- **Launch: 1973** - one of the world's first large-scale species conservation programmes.
- **Current Network:** Expanded from **9 reserves (1973)** to **51 tiger reserves** across **18 tiger-range states**, covering approximately **2.23%** of India's geographical area.
- **Conservation Success:** India hosts over **70% of the world's wild tiger population**, with numbers rising from **1,411 (2006)** to **3,682 (2022)**.
- **Governance Structure:**
 - **Nodal Ministry:** MoEFCC
 - **Implementing Agency:** **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** - statutory body under the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**

Core-Buffer Strategy

- **Core Areas:** Inviolable zones with legal status of National Park or Sanctuary where human activity is restricted to protect critical tiger habitats.
- **Buffer Zones:** Multiple-use peripheral areas promoting **human-wildlife coexistence**, sustainable livelihoods for local communities, and eco-development activities.

Future Roadmap & Institutional Synergy

- **Long-term Planning:** The working groups are expected to submit their reports before the **29th NTCA meeting**, outlining recommendations for the next quarter-century.
- **Institutional Coordination:** The initiative seeks to enhance coordination between the **NTCA** and premier scientific bodies, including:
 - **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**
 - **Botanical Survey of India (BSI)**
 - **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)**
 - **Indian Council for Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)**
- **Technological Integration:** The upgrade aims to adapt conservation measures to modern challenges using updated scientific data and monitoring tools.

National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):

- A **statutory body** established in **2006** following the amendment of the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**.
- It provides statutory backing to **Project Tiger** and oversees the management of tiger reserves through periodic **All-India Tiger Estimation** (conducted every 4 years).

NITI Aayog Releases Net Zero Roadmap for Waste Sector

What's the News?

- **NITI Aayog** released **Volume 8** of its landmark study "**Scenarios Towards Viksit Bharat and Net Zero**", presenting a strategic roadmap for transforming India's waste sector into a resource recovery powerhouse.
- The report outlines pathways to align India's **Viksit Bharat 2047** vision with its **Net Zero 2070** climate commitment, focusing on decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in waste management.
- It projects that without intervention, waste sector emissions could grow **3.5 times by 2070**, but with aggressive action, emissions can be reduced by **95.9%** compared to current policy trajectories.

Waste Sector Emissions Challenge

- **Current Footprint:** The waste sector contributed approximately **76 MtCO₂e** in 2020, representing **2.56%** of India's total GHG emissions and ranking as the fourth-largest emission source.
- **Growth Trajectory:**
 - **Municipal Solid Waste (MSW):** Daily generation of **170,000 tonnes** (62 million tonnes annually) projected to reach **165 million tonnes by 2030** and **436 million tonnes by 2050**.
 - **Wastewater:** **221,173 million litres per day** generated domestically, with only **44.9%** currently treated.
- **Emission Composition:**
 - **Methane (CH₄)** dominates at **75.7%** of waste sector emissions (from landfills and wastewater).
 - **Domestic wastewater** accounts for **45%** of sub-sector emissions, **industrial wastewater** for **29%**, and **solid waste management** for **26%**.

Two Scenarios: Current Policy vs. Net Zero

Parameter	Current Policy Scenario (CPS)	Net Zero Scenario (NZS)
2070 Emissions	266.10 MtCO₂e (3.5x increase from 2020)	10.9 MtCO₂e (95.9% reduction vs CPS)
MSW Treatment	85% by 2050	100% collection and segregation; 85% treatment
Sewer Connectivity	65% by 2070	85% with universal methane capture
Industrial Wastewater	Partial methane recovery	100% methane recovery by 2040

Strategic Interventions

- **Universal Collection:** Achieve **100% door-to-door solid waste collection** and complete wastewater treatment by **2047**.

- **Source Segregation:** Mandate strict segregation into biodegradable, recyclable, and non-recyclable categories to enable resource recovery.
- **Bio-methanation Scale-up:** Process wet waste through bio-methanation and **bio-CNG** production; processing just **50% of wet waste** could generate **₹2,460 crore** annually.
- **Circular Economy Integration:**
 - Formalize the **informal waste sector** (currently handling **90% of e-waste** through unauthorized channels).
 - Strengthen **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** frameworks for batteries, e-waste, and plastics.
- **Technology Deployment:** Deploy **anaerobic digestion systems** with methane capture for wastewater treatment to replace aerobic systems that release emissions.

Constitutional & Policy Framework:

- **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016:** Mandate source segregation and scientific disposal; extended to villages with population >3,000 in 2020 amendment.
- **Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016:** Established EPR framework for plastic producers, importers, and brand owners.
- **National Policy on Faecal Sludge and Septage Management, 2017:** Addresses safe management of human waste from onsite sanitation systems.

Flagship Missions:

- **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban 2.0):** Already bio-remediated **1,140 lakh tonnes** of legacy waste from **2,429 dump sites** (48% of total legacy waste).
- **AMRUT 2.0:** Focuses on universal water supply and sewerage coverage in all statutory towns.
- **GOBARdhan (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan):** Promotes bio-CNG production from agricultural and organic waste.
- **SATAT (Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation):** Initiative to establish compressed biogas plants.

Odisha Records Highest Dolphin Population in Five Years

What's the News?

- **Odisha** recorded **765 dolphins** across **six species** in the 2025-26 state-wide census, marking the **highest count in five years** and indicating stable to improving marine ecosystem health.
- The census conducted by the **Wildlife Wing of the Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department** demonstrates the success of sustained conservation efforts, habitat protection, and community participation.
- **Chilika Lake** hosts **159 Irrawaddy dolphins**, the largest single-area concentration globally for this endangered species while **Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary** shelters **474 Humpback dolphins**.

2026 Census: Species-Wise Distribution

Species	Count	Key Habitat	Conservation Status
Humpback Dolphin	497	Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary (474)	Vulnerable
Irrawaddy Dolphin	208	Chilika Lake (159)	Endangered
Bottlenose Dolphin	55	Coastal waters	Least Concern
Spinner Dolphin	3	Offshore waters	Least Concern
Finless Porpoise	2	Coastal estuaries	Vulnerable

Population Trends: Five-Year Analysis

- **2020-21:** 544 dolphins (209 Irrawaddy)
- **2021-22:** 726 dolphins (208 Irrawaddy)
- **2022-23:** 733 dolphins (69 Irrawaddy)
- **2023-24:** 743 dolphins (181 Irrawaddy)
- **2024-25:** 710 dolphins (188 Irrawaddy)
- **2025-26:** 765 dolphins (208 Irrawaddy); **Highest in 5 years**

Conservation Zones

- **Chilika Lake:**
 - **159 Irrawaddy dolphins** highest global concentration in a single area.
 - Designated **Ramsar site** (wetland of international importance).
 - Success attributed to long-term habitat protection, wetland management, and community participation.
 - Population has stabilized at 159 for two consecutive years.
- **Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary** (Kendrapara district):
 - **474 Humpback dolphins** major marine conservation stronghold.
 - Also world's largest nesting ground for **Olive Ridley sea turtles**.
- **Other Sightings:**
 - **Balasore Wildlife Division:** 15 Irrawaddy dolphins
 - **Berhampur:** 13 Irrawaddy dolphins
 - **Puri Wildlife Division:** 12 Irrawaddy dolphins
 - **Rajnagar Mangrove Division:** 9 Irrawaddy dolphins

Additional Info

- **Legal Protection:**
 - **Schedule I** of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** highest protection level.
 - **IUCN Red List:** Irrawaddy dolphins classified as **Endangered**.
 - **CITES Appendix I:** International trade prohibited.
- **Biological Characteristics:**
 - **Echolocation:** Use sound waves for navigation and hunting.

- **Social Behavior:** Live in structured pods for protection and cooperation.
- **Indicator Species:** Presence reflects healthy water quality, fish abundance, and balanced coastal ecosystems.
- **Intelligence:** Advanced problem-solving skills and communication systems.

NGT Clears ₹81,000 Crore Great Nicobar Mega Infrastructure Project

What's the News?

- The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has approved the **Great Nicobar Island Integrated Development Project** with a total outlay of **₹81,000 crore**.
- The tribunal stated it found **"no good ground" to intervene** in the environmental clearance already granted to the project.
- The NGT cited **adequate environmental safeguards** and the project's **strategic importance** due to proximity to the **Malacca Strait**.
- The project will be implemented by **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO)** under the conceptual framework of **NITI Aayog**.
- All environmental petitions against the project have been **dismissed**, allowing construction to proceed.

Project Overview & Key Components

Aspect	Details
Total Cost	₹81,000 crore (revised from ₹72,000 crore)
Area Covered	166 square kilometers on Great Nicobar Island
Implementation	ANIIDCO (Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation)
Planning Body	NITI Aayog
Phase 1 Completion	Expected by 2028
Full Completion	Expected by 2050

Four Core Components

- **International Container Transshipment Terminal:** Deep-draft port at **Galathea Bay** for handling large vessels.
- **Greenfield International Airport:** Dual-use (civilian and military) airport to enhance connectivity.
- **Township Development:** Two new townships for residential and commercial purposes.
- **Power Plant:** 450 MVA capacity gas and solar-based power generation facility.

Strategic Significance of the Project?

Overview

The **Great Nicobar Island (GNI) Project** is a **holistic infrastructure initiative** conceived by **NITI Aayog** to transform India's southernmost island into a major **maritime hub and strategic outpost** in the Bay of

Bengal, countering foreign influence in the Indian Ocean Region.

Key Components

- **International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT) at Galathea Bay:**
 - Estimated cost: ₹40,040 crore
 - Phase 1 capacity: 4 million TEUs annually (targeted by 2028)
 - Full capacity: 16 million TEUs annually
 - No foreign operators allowed; Indian private entity to hold majority (>51%) stake with state port trusts as minority partners
 - 50-year concession period with viability gap funding
- **Greenfield International Airport:** Dual-use civil-military facility to enhance connectivity and defence capabilities.
- **Integrated Township:** Supporting projected population and economic activities.
- **450-MVA Power Plant:** Gas and solar-based energy infrastructure.

Strategic Value

- **Geopolitical Positioning:** Located just 40 km from the Malacca Strait, through which one-third of global trade passes.
- **Act East Policy:** Counterbalances China's "String of Pearls" strategy and growing presence in the Indian Ocean.
- **Economic Impact:** Expected to generate approximately 1,28,558 jobs and save significant transshipment costs currently paid to foreign ports.

Environmental Safeguards Imposed by NGT?

The Tribunal imposed **binding conditions** to mitigate ecological damage:

- **Shoreline Protection:**
 - No erosion or adverse shoreline changes permitted from construction activities.
 - Zero loss of sandy beaches critical for turtle and bird nesting sites.
- **Coral Reef Conservation:**
 - Translocation of scattered corals as per Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) protocols.
 - Implementation of coral regeneration through proven scientific methods.
 - Protection of all coral reefs along the coastal stretch.
- **Endangered Species Protection:** Specific conditions for:
 - Leatherback sea turtles
 - Nicobar megapode
 - Saltwater crocodiles
 - Robber crab
 - Nicobar macaque
 - Other endemic bird species
- **Compliance Mechanism:**
 - Government bound by all environmental clearance conditions.
 - Periodic compliance reviews and monitoring committee oversight.
 - Independent monitoring committees for tribal welfare and pollution control.

Areas of Concern?

Ecological Impact

- **Forest Diversion:** 130 sq km of primary tropical rainforest (15% of GNI's landmass) to be cleared, involving felling of approximately 10 million trees.
- **Wildlife Sanctuary Denotification:** Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (designated 1997 for leatherback turtle conservation) was denotified in 2021 for port construction.
- **Biodiversity Loss:** Project affects unique island ecosystem with endemic species found nowhere else.

Tribal Rights Issues

- **Indigenous Communities:** Threatens Shompen (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group) and Nicobarese communities with displacement from ancestral lands devastated by the 2004 tsunami.
- **Consultation Gaps:** Allegations of inadequate representation in public hearings and requests for "surrender certificates" for tribal land claims.
- **Forest Rights:** Mandatory consultation required under Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Jarawa (2004) and Shompen (2015) Policies.

Procedural Concerns

- **Data Limitations:** Environmental Impact Assessment based on single-season data rather than comprehensive multi-seasonal studies.
- **ICRZ Violations:** Petitions alleged 700 hectares fall within Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) 1A areas where development is prohibited; NGT accepted High-Powered Committee findings that no prohibited areas were involved.
- **Conflict of Interest:** High-Powered Committee reviewing clearance included officials from ministries that granted the clearance.

Additional Info

Legal and Constitutional Framework

- **National Green Tribunal (NGT):**
 - Established under National Green Tribunal Act, 2010
 - **Chairperson:** Justice Prakash Shrivastava (former Chief Justice of Chhattisgarh High Court).
 - Mandate: Expedite disposal of environmental protection and conservation cases.
- **Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) Notification, 2019:**
 - Prohibits development in CRZ 1A (ecologically sensitive areas with coral reefs, mangroves, nesting grounds).
 - Regulates construction in CRZ 1B and other coastal zones.
- **Forest Clearance Process:**
 - **Stage I (In-Principle):** Granted 2022.
 - **Stage II (Final):** Pending; requires compensatory afforestation.
 - **Compensatory Afforestation:** Proposed in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh (critics argue this cannot replicate lost island biodiversity).

Related Conservation Frameworks

- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Galathea Bay notified as sanctuary in 1997; denotified 2021.
- **Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** Great Nicobar falls within **UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves**.
- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Mandates free, prior, informed consent of tribal communities.

Maritime Context

- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982:** Governs maritime rights and exclusive economic zones.
- **Ten Degree Channel:** Separates Andaman Islands from Nicobar Islands; critical shipping lane.

NHAI Launches India's First Bee Corridors for Pollinator Conservation

What's the News?

- The **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)** has announced India's first dedicated '**Bee Corridors**' along National Highways to support pollinator populations.
- The initiative aims to reduce ecological stress on **honeybees and other pollinators** by creating linear stretches of vegetation that provide year-round nectar and pollen.
- During **2026–27**, NHAI plans to plant approximately **40 lakh trees** along highways, with nearly **60%** designated under this Bee Corridor initiative.
- At least **three dedicated pollinator corridors** will be developed by NHAI field offices during the year.

Bee Corridors: Concept & Implementation

What Are Bee Corridors?

- **Linear green infrastructure** consisting of flowering trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses planted strategically along highway stretches.
- Designed to ensure **near-continuous blooming** across seasons through staggered flowering cycles.
- Flowering clusters planted every **500 metres to 1 kilometre**, aligning with the average **1 km foraging range** of honeybees.

Features

- **Native, Nectar-Rich Species:** Prioritizes indigenous trees including **Neem, Karanj, Mahua, Palash, Jamun, Siris and Bottle Brush**.
- **Ecological Design:**
 - Allows flowering weeds to bloom naturally.
 - Retains dead wood and hollow trunks to provide **nesting spaces** for wild bees.
 - Mix of trees, shrubs and ground cover to create layered habitat.
- **Agro-Climatic Planning:** Field offices identify suitable highway stretches based on local ecological conditions.

Why Pollinator Conservation Matters

- **Agricultural Dependency:** Nearly **75% of global flowering plants** and approximately **one-third of food crops** rely on animal pollination.

- **Ecosystem Services:** Pollinators are critical for maintaining biodiversity, food security and agricultural productivity.
- **Global Decline:** Rising ecological stress has affected pollinator populations worldwide, threatening food systems and natural habitats.

Additional Info

Related Initiatives & Context

- **National Green Highway Program:** Existing NHAI initiative for plantation along highways; Bee Corridors represent an ecological upgrade.
- **Compensatory Afforestation:** Aligns with requirements under **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** and **Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
- **International Commitments:** Supports India's **CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity)** obligations and **SDG 15 (Life on Land)**.

Ecological Corridors: Broader Concept

- **Definition:** Strips of habitat connecting wildlife populations separated by human activities or infrastructure.
- **Types:**
 - **Wildlife Corridors:** For large mammal movement (e.g., elephant corridors).
 - **Pollinator Corridors:** For insect mobility and foraging (Bee Corridors).
 - **Riparian Corridors:** Along water bodies.
- **Benefits:** Reduces habitat fragmentation, enables genetic exchange, supports migration and maintains ecosystem services.

Constitutional & Policy Framework

- **Article 48A:** Directive Principle for environment protection and safeguarding forests/wildlife.
- **Article 51A(g):** Fundamental duty of citizens to protect and improve the natural environment.
- **Biological Diversity Act, 2002:** Legal framework for conserving biodiversity and sustainable use of biological resources.

Surge in Forest Fires Across North-East India

What's the News?

- Massive **forest fires** have been reported across **Arunachal Pradesh** and **Nagaland**, causing significant ecological damage.
- The blaze in **Walong**, Arunachal Pradesh, has persisted for several days, prompting urgent intervention.
- The **Indian Army** and **Indian Air Force (IAF)** have intensified operations to control the flames and prevent further spread.
- Local communities and biodiversity hotspots face immediate threats due to smoke inhalation and habitat loss.

Impact and Scale of the Fires?

- **Geographic Reach:** Large-scale blazes have been reported in **Anjaw** and **Lohit** districts of Arunachal Pradesh and the high-altitude grasslands of Nagaland.

- **Ecological Damage:** The fires threaten biodiversity-rich zones, including habitats of endangered species and critical carbon sinks.
- **Operational Challenges:** Difficult terrain, steep slopes, and high wind speeds have hampered manual firefighting efforts, necessitating aerial intervention.
- **Casualties and Displacement:** While primarily affecting forest land, the smoke has caused respiratory concerns in nearby settlements and forced the evacuation of certain border outposts.

Drivers of Forest Fires in the Northeast?

- **Climate Factors:** Prolonged dry spells, higher-than-average temperatures, and the absence of pre-monsoon showers have turned forest floors into tinderboxes.
- **Anthropogenic Activities:** Traditional **Jhum (Shifting) Cultivation**, where land is cleared by burning, remains a significant contributor when fires spread uncontrollably.
- **Biomass Accumulation:** The accumulation of dry pine needles and leaf litter during the winter season acts as highly inflammable fuel.

Ecological Significance of the Region:

- The Northeast falls under the **Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot**.
- **Dzukou Valley** is famous for the endemic **Dzukou Lily** and is a critical trekking destination that faces recurring fire threats.

Forest Fire Statistics (FSI Data):

- According to the **Forest Survey of India (FSI):**
 - Over **36%** of India's forest cover is prone to forest fires.
 - **North-East states** consistently record high incidences of fire due to slash-and-burn agriculture (**Jhum cultivation**).
 - **Mizoram, Nagaland, and Manipur** are often classified as highly prone zones.

Congo Basin Lakes Releasing Ancient Carbon from Peatlands

What's the News?

A study published in **Nature Geoscience** by researchers from **ETH Zurich** has revealed that **Lake Mai-Ndombe** and **Lake Tumba** in the Democratic Republic of Congo are emitting **ancient carbon dioxide**—up to **40% of which originates from peat deposits over 3,000 years old**. This finding challenges the assumption that tropical peatlands permanently lock away carbon and raises concerns about potential climate feedback loops.

Ancient Carbon Emissions?

Key Findings:

- **40% of CO₂ emissions** from the two lakes comes from ancient peat carbon (3,000+ years old)
- Carbon was previously believed to remain **stably trapped** in waterlogged peat soils
- Lakes are "**blackwater**" systems—stained dark by dissolved plant material and soil organic matter
- **Lake Mai-Ndombe:** Africa's largest blackwater lake, **4x larger than Lake Constance**

- Exact mechanism of carbon transport from peatlands to lakes remains **unclear**

Research Significance:

- Indicates the carbon reservoir has a "**leak**" allowing ancient carbon to escape
- Questions whether this represents **natural balance** or **destabilizing shift**
- Suggests tropical peatlands may not be as secure a carbon sink as previously assumed

Congo Basin Peatlands?

Scale of Carbon Storage:

- Cover only **0.3% of Earth's land surface**
- Store approximately **one-third of all carbon** in tropical peatlands globally
- Part of the **world's second-largest rainforest** (after Amazon)
- Estimated **100 gigatonnes of carbon** locked in tropical peatlands worldwide

Formation Process:

- Peat forms from **partially decomposed plant material** in waterlogged, oxygen-poor conditions
- Prevents complete decomposition, allowing carbon accumulation over millennia
- **Congo Basin peatlands** among the most significant yet least-studied carbon reservoirs

Climate Risks & Feedback Loops?

Drought and Drying:

- Climate change may cause **peat soils to dry out** more frequently
- Oxygen penetration accelerates **microbial breakdown** of organic material
- Could trigger **massive CO₂ release** from this enormous carbon store
- Risk of reaching **tipping point** where emissions become self-sustaining

Methane Dynamics:

- Parallel study in **Journal of Geophysical Research** found water levels strongly influence **methane emissions**
- **High water levels:** Microorganisms consume methane before atmospheric release
- **Low water levels (dry season):** Less methane breakdown, larger emissions
- Fear that **longer, more intense droughts** could turn lakes into significant methane sources

Deforestation Pressures:

- **DR Congo population projected to triple by 2050**
- Increasing demand for farmland driving **forest clearing**
- Deforestation intensifies **drought conditions** by reducing evapotranspiration
- Forests act as "**green lungs**"—not just gas exchange but water vapor release promoting precipitation

Additional Info

Research Context:

- **TropSEDs project:** Led by ETH Zurich, funded by **Swiss National Science Foundation**
- Collaboration with **University of Louvain (Belgium)** and **DR Congo institutions**
- Congo Basin remains **one of the least-studied major forest ecosystems**

Related Climate Concepts:

- **Radiocarbon dating:** Method used to determine age of dissolved CO₂
- **Blackwater rivers/lakes:** High dissolved organic matter from plant decay, tea-colored water
- **Carbon sink vs. source:** Ecosystems that absorb vs. emit carbon
- **Tipping point:** Threshold beyond which change becomes irreversible

Global Implications:

- Findings help improve **global climate models**—tropical lakes/wetlands currently underrepresented
- Highlights urgency of **Congo Basin wetland protection**
- Reinforces need for **emission reduction** to prevent triggering peatland carbon release

Key Data Points:

- **Ancient carbon proportion:** Up to 40% of lake emissions
- **Peatland coverage:** 0.3% of global land area
- **Carbon storage:** ~33% of tropical peatland carbon
- **Population projection:** 3x increase by 2050 in DR Congo

India Launches Zero Prize: First Results-Based National Environmental Award

What's the News?

- India has introduced the **Zero Prize**, the nation's first results-based incentive program aimed at tackling environmental degradation.
- The initiative offers a **total prize pool of ₹5 crore** across three categories: **Air, Water, and Land pollution**.
- The award was announced at the **India Habitat Centre, New Delhi**, during the **India Climate Week 2026** event.
- **Applications open in March 2026** and close in **August 2026**, with winners to be announced in **February 2027** following technical evaluation.
- The prize is designed to incentivize **scientifically validated, measurable on-ground pollution reduction** through independent monitoring.

The Zero Prize Framework

Overview

- **Total Corpus:** ₹5 crore
- **Award Structure:** ₹1 crore each across three categories — **Air, Water, and Land**.
- **Nature:** Annual national initiative with performance-linked funding.
- **Funding Model:** Supported through philanthropic contributions, corporate **CSR partnerships**, and institutional stakeholders.

Key Features

- **Results-Based Accountability:** Only solutions demonstrating scientifically validated pollution reduction within defined geographies qualify.

- **Independent Verification:** All projects undergo third-party monitoring and validation; early-stage concepts without on-ground execution are ineligible.
- **12-Month Challenge Period:** Shortlisted solutions must establish documented baselines and demonstrate quantifiable reduction.
- **Eligibility:** Open to **start-ups, NGOs, corporates, municipal bodies, research institutions**, and individual innovators.

Measurement Parameters

- **Air:** Reduction in particulate exposure measured through fixed-location monitoring systems (adjusted for meteorological variation).
- **Water:** Pollutant load reduction including **Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD)**, **Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)**, and nutrients at discharge points using **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** aligned protocols.
- **Land:** Reduction in waste leakage/improper disposal assessed through traceable weight-based audits.

Timeline & Implementation

- **Application Period:** March 2026 – August 2026
- **Winner Announcement:** February 2027
- **Disbursement:** Milestone-based structure tied to successful pilot execution and verified outcomes.

Gas Leak at Valsad Pharmaceutical Unit Highlights Industrial Safety Gaps

What's the News?

- A gas leak at **Sainex Met Chem Pharma** in **Sarigam GIDC, Valsad district, Gujarat** resulted in **four persons hospitalized**, including the **unit owner Vinod Patel** and three workers.
- The incident occurred when **liquid overflowed from a reactor** during a chemical process, evaporating to form gas that caused **eye irritation, breathing problems, and tear gas-like effects**.
- All victims are now **stable and recovering**; the **Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB)** has launched an inquiry to determine the exact chemical compound involved and causative factors.

Incident Details and Response

- Location: Sarigam GIDC** (Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation estate), an Industrial Notified Area near **Vapi**, Valsad district.
- Immediate Impact:**
 - Four individuals exposed — owner supervising the process and three contractual labourers aged 21–22 years.
 - Gas affected **passersby** outside the premises, causing teary eyes.
 - Road adjoining the unit **temporarily closed** to prevent wider exposure.
- Emergency Measures:**
 - Fire teams** deployed for rescue and restoration operations.
 - Sand and sodium bicarbonate** used to control and neutralize the leak.
 - Factory **doors and windows sealed** to prevent gas-air mixing.
 - Water sprinkled** on concentrated chemical substance to mitigate effects.

Systemic Industrial Safety Challenges

- Reactor Integrity:** Preliminary reports suggest **compromised reactor integrity** despite continued operation — highlighting inadequate **pressure vessel testing** and maintenance protocols.
- Regulatory Enforcement:** Factory operational for **six years** with "okay" documentation, yet basic process safety management failed during routine operations.
- Workforce Vulnerability:**
 - Contractual labourers** often lack training in **Stop-Work authority** and **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** usage.
 - Owner presence during incident indicates **inadequate safety delegation** and process hazard analysis.
- Infrastructure Ageing:** Many reactors in **Gujarat's older GIDCs** have exceeded **20-year safety lifespans**, with corrosion-related failures increasingly reported.

National Context: Chemical Accident Risk in India

- Major Accident Hazard (MAH) Units:** India operates **over 1,861 MAH units** across **300 districts**, with **Gujarat accounting for 35% of national chemical production**.
- Accident Frequency:** **15–20 significant chemical accidents** reported annually between 2021–2024, concentrated in **Gujarat and Maharashtra chemical belts**.
- Casualty Statistics:** Over the last decade, chemical accidents have caused **250+ deaths** and **500+ major injuries**.
- SME Vulnerability:** **60% of chemical mishaps** occur in **Small and Medium Enterprises** where safety audits are less rigorous than in large MNCs.

Notable Chemical Disasters in India

Incident	Year	Chemical	Impact
Bhopal Gas Tragedy	1984	Methyl Isocyanate (MIC)	World's worst industrial disaster; thousands killed
Vizag Gas Leak	2020	Styrene Gas	12 deaths; thousands hospitalized
Surat Gas Leak	2022	Hazardous Waste Gas	6 workers died from tanker fumes
Ludhiana Gas Leak	2023	Hydrogen Sulfide	11 deaths from sewer gas exposure
Vapi Chemical Blast	2024	Multiple Reactants	Large-scale fire and toxic evacuation

Regulatory Framework

- Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB):**
 - Responsible for **environmental compliance** and **hazardous substance regulation** in industrial estates.
 - Mandated to conduct **surprise inspections** and enforce **Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals (MSIHC) Rules, 1989**.
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Guidelines:**
 - Risk Mapping:** Zone of Impact identification for MAH units.
 - Buffer Zones:** Mandatory no-construction areas around hazardous storage.
 - Emergency Response Centers (ERCs):** 24/7 facilities with Hazmat capabilities.
 - Quarterly Mock Drills:** Joint exercises between factories, fire departments, and hospitals.

- **Antidote Banks:** Medical preparedness with specific antidotes for local industrial chemicals.

PM RAHAT Scheme: Cashless Treatment for Road Accident Victims

What's the News?

- The Government has launched **PM RAHAT (Road Accident Victim Hospitalization and Assured Treatment)** to provide **cashless treatment up to ₹1.5 lakh** for road accident victims during the critical **Golden Hour**.
- The scheme covers all eligible victims on any category of road for **7 days** from the date of accident, ensuring immediate medical care without financial barriers.
- Approved by the Prime Minister, the initiative aims to address India's high road accident mortality rate, where nearly **50% of deaths are preventable** with timely hospital admission.

Key Features & Implementation

- **Coverage:** Cashless treatment up to **₹1.5 lakh per victim** for 7 days from accident date.
- **Golden Hour Focus:** Integration with **112 emergency helpline** for rapid hospital access and coordination.
- **Stabilization Period:**
 - **24 hours** for non-life-threatening cases
 - **48 hours** for life-threatening cases
- **Digital Integration:** Seamless linkage between **eDAR (Electronic Detailed Accident Report)** platform under MoRTH and **TMS 2.0 (Transaction Management System)** under National Health Authority for end-to-end claim processing.
- **Police Authentication:** Mandatory confirmation within 24–48 hours to ensure accountability and prevent fraud.
- **Funding Mechanism:**
 - **Motor Vehicle Accident Fund (MVAFF)** serves as primary funding source
 - Insured cases funded via insurance contributions
 - Uninsured/Hit-and-Run cases covered through budgetary support
- **Time-bound Payments:** Claims approved by State Health Authorities to be paid within **10 days**.
- **Grievance Redressal:** District-level oversight by **Road Safety Committee** chaired by District Collector/District Magistrate.

Government Launches SAHI and BODH Initiatives for Responsible AI in Healthcare

What's the News?

- Union Health Minister **Jagat Prakash Nadda** launched two pioneering digital health initiatives — **SAHI (Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India)** and **BODH (Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI)** — at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026**.

- The initiatives aim to create a **safe, transparent, accountable and evidence-based AI ecosystem** in India's healthcare sector.
- **SAHI** serves as a national governance framework and policy roadmap, while **BODH** provides a testing and validation platform for AI solutions before deployment.
- The launch marks India's transition from AI experimentation to **systematic, safe and scalable implementation** in health services.

SAHI: Strategy for AI in Healthcare

Overview

- A comprehensive **governance framework and policy compass** for responsible adoption of AI in healthcare.
- Guides **ethical, transparent and people-centric** use of AI technologies across Union and State levels.

Features

- **Governance Structure:** Establishes uniform policy guidelines for AI adoption and regulation at national and state levels.
- **Ethical Standards:** Mandates **consent-based data use**, algorithmic transparency and accountability mechanisms to prevent misuse or bias.
- **Interoperability:** Ensures AI solutions integrate seamlessly with existing digital health infrastructure like **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)**.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Approach:** Facilitates collaboration among government bodies, academic institutions, startups and industry.

BODH: Benchmarking Platform for Health AI

Overview

- A national **testing and validation platform** developed by **IIT Kanpur** in collaboration with the **National Health Authority (NHA)**.
- Evaluates AI solutions using diverse, **anonymized real-world health datasets** before large-scale deployment.

Functions

- **Performance Validation:** Measures accuracy, consistency and operational reliability under practical healthcare conditions.
- **Bias Detection:** Identifies algorithmic bias and unintended risks to prevent inequitable outcomes.
- **Clinical Relevance:** Verifies that AI solutions align with medical standards and address real public health needs.
- **Standardized Evaluation:** Establishes national benchmarking norms for uniform quality standards in health AI systems.

Additional Info

Digital Health Evolution in India

- **Digital India Programme (2015):** Laid foundations for digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.
- **National Health Policy (2017):** Envisaged interoperable, inclusive and scalable digital health ecosystem.
- **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (2020):** Established robust digital public architecture for healthcare with interoperable systems and consent-based data frameworks.

AI Governance Context

- **Global Precedents:** WHO has issued guidance on AI in health emphasizing ethics, safety and transparency.

- **Data Protection:** Aligns with **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** for consent-based health data use.
- **Regulatory Framework:** Supports future regulation of AI as a medical device under **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940** and **Medical Devices Rules, 2017**.

Constitutional & Policy Framework

- **Article 21:** Right to life includes access to quality healthcare; safe AI deployment protects this right.
- **Concurrent List (Entry 29):** Public health allows both Centre and States to legislate on health matters.
- **Union Ministry:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) serves as nodal agency for both initiatives.

Launch of Indigenously Developed Tetanus and Adult Diphtheria (Td) Vaccine

What's the News?

- Union Health Minister **J.P. Nadda** has officially launched the India-made **Tetanus and adult Diphtheria (Td) vaccine**.
- The vaccine is designed to replace the traditional **Tetanus Toxoid (TT)** vaccine in the national immunization efforts for adolescents and adults.

Td Vaccine: Key Features

Purpose

- **Booster immunization** protecting against **tetanus** and **diphtheria**—two life-threatening bacterial infections.
- Maintains long-term immunity after childhood vaccination protection declines.
- Recommended every **10 years** as periodic booster dose.

Types of Vaccines

- **Td Vaccine:** Protects against tetanus and diphtheria only.
- **Tdap Vaccine:** Protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and **pertussis** (whooping cough); recommended for pregnant women and caregivers.

Safety & Administration

- Can be co-administered with other vaccines during same visit.
- Generally safe with mild, short-lived side effects.
- Prevents severe complications including **respiratory failure**.

Production & Supply Details

- **Initial Supply:** **55 lakh doses** by April.
- **Manufacturing Unit:** Central Research Institute, Kasauli (first government institute to manufacture vaccines under **Good Manufacturing Practices/GMP** standards).
- **Future Scale:** Production expected to increase progressively to meet UIP demands.

Additional Info

- **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP):**
 - Launched in its current form in **1985**, it provides free vaccines against several life-threatening diseases.
 - Diseases covered include Tuberculosis, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio, Hepatitis

B, Pneumonia, and Meningitis caused by Haemophilus Influenzae Type B (Hib), Measles, Rubella, Japanese Encephalitis (JE), and Rotavirus diarrhoea.

Disease Profiles:

- **Tetanus:** Caused by *Clostridium tetani*; affects the nervous system leading to muscle stiffness ("lockjaw").
- **Diphtheria:** Caused by *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*; primarily affects the mucous membranes of the throat and nose.

Mission Indradhanush:

- A flagship initiative to ensure **90%** full immunization coverage across India, focusing on "left-out" and "dropped-out" children and pregnant women.

India Launches Nationwide Free HPV Vaccination for Adolescent Girls

What's the News?

The Union Health Ministry is rolling out a nationwide **Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme** targeting **14-year-old girls** across India. The initiative provides free, voluntary vaccination at government health facilities to prevent cervical cancer. A high-intensity **90-day campaign** will kick off the programme, followed by integration into routine immunisation schedules. The government has secured **2.6 crore doses** through **Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance**, sufficient for two years of implementation.

The Vaccine: Gardasil-4

- **Type:** Quadrivalent vaccine (protects against HPV types 16, 18, 6, and 11)
- **Manufacturer:** Merck & Co (MSD)
- **Dosage:** Single dose (as per WHO 2022 recommendations)
- **Effectiveness:** **93–100%** against vaccine-covered cancer-causing HPV types
- **Coverage:** HPV types 16 and 18 account for **over 80%** of cervical cancer cases in India

Why single dose?

- Simplifies delivery and improves compliance.
- Aligns with global best practices (over 90 countries now use single-dose schedules).
- Makes large-scale immunisation feasible in resource-constrained settings.

Implementation Framework

Target Population: Approximately **1.15 crore** 14-year-old girls across India.

Delivery Points:

- **Ayushman Arogya Mandirs** (Primary Health Centres)
- Community Health Centres
- Sub-District and District Hospitals
- Government Medical Colleges

Key Features:

- **Voluntary participation** with mandatory parental/guardian consent.
- **U-WIN portal** for appointment booking.

- 24×7 linkage to government health facilities for adverse event management.
- Cold Chain Points (CCP) at all sites for safe vaccine storage.
- Trained medical officers at each session for post-vaccination observation.

Cervical Cancer Burden in India

- **Ranking:** Second most common cancer among Indian women (after breast cancer).
- **Annual new cases:** Nearly **80,000**
- **Annual deaths:** Over **42,000**
- **Global comparison:** India reported **1.27 lakh** new cases and nearly **80,000 deaths** in a single year (Globocan 2022).
- **Cause:** Almost all cases result from persistent infection with high-risk HPV types.

Additional Info

Global Context:

- Over **500 million doses** administered worldwide since 2006.
- More than **150 countries** have introduced HPV vaccination in national immunisation schedules.
- India joins this group with evidence-based single-dose strategy.

Available HPV Vaccines in Private Market:

- **Cervarix** (GSK, UK) – Bivalent.
- **Cervavac** (Serum Institute of India) – Quadrivalent.
- **Gardasil 4** and **Gardasil 9** (Merck) – Quadrivalent and Nonavalent.
- Gardasil 9 (priced above ₹10,000/dose) offers broader protection but government opted for cost-effective Gardasil 4 given HPV 16/18 dominance in India.

Policy Guidance:

- **National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI)** – Recommends vaccine policy in India
- **WHO Position Paper (2022)** – Supports one or two-dose regimens for girls aged 9–14 years



Economy & Finance

Union Budget 2026-27: Strategic Push for Aatmanirbhar Bharat

What's the News?

Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** presented the **Union Budget 2026-27**, marking her ninth consecutive budget with record allocations across defence, manufacturing, and agriculture. Key highlights include **₹7.85 lakh crore** for defence (highest ever), **Biopharma SHAKTI** mission with **₹10,000 crore** outlay, **new Income Tax Act** replacing the 1961 legislation, and **16th Finance Commission** recommendations to recognize heatwaves and lightning as national disasters.

New Income Tax Act, 2025?

- **Effective Date: April 1, 2026** – replaces six-decade-old Income Tax Act, 1961.
- **Simplification:** Redesigned forms enabling ordinary citizens to comply without professional help.
- **Staggered Deadlines:**
 - **July 31:** ITR-1 and ITR-2 for individuals.
 - **August 31:** Non-audit business cases and trusts.
- **Extended Revision Window:** Revised returns permitted until **March 31** (vs. December 31 earlier) with nominal fee (**₹1,000** for income below ₹5 lakh, **₹5,000** otherwise).
- **Decriminalization:** Technical defaults converted to fees; maximum imprisonment reduced from 7 years to **2 years**.
- **FAST DS:** One-time **6-month disclosure window** for students and relocated NRIs to declare overseas assets (under ₹1 crore/₹5 crore thresholds) with immunity from prosecution.
- **Other Measures:**
 - **TCS** on overseas tour packages reduced to **2%** (from 5%/20%).
 - Stock buybacks now treated as **capital gains** (12.5% long-term) instead of dividend income.
 - Interest awarded by Motor Accident Claims Tribunal exempted from tax.

Manufacturing in 7 Strategic Sectors?

Comprehensive industrial strategy to shift from assembly-led growth to deep manufacturing:

- **Biopharma SHAKTI:** **₹10,000 crore** over 5 years.
 - **3 new NIPERs** and upgradation of 7 existing institutes.
 - **1,000+ accredited clinical trial sites**.
 - Strengthened **CDSCO** with dedicated scientific review cadre.
 - Focus: Biologics and biosimilars for cancer, diabetes, autoimmune disorders.
- **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) 2.0:** Focus on equipment, materials, and full-stack Indian IP.
- **Electronics Components:** Outlay increased from ₹22,919 crore to **₹40,000 crore**.
- **Chemical Parks:** **3 plug-and-play parks** through challenge-based cluster model.
- **Container Manufacturing:** **₹10,000 crore** over 5 years.

- **Capital Goods:** New CIE (Construction & Infrastructure Equipment) scheme including tunnel-boring equipment for high-altitude strategic roads.
- **Textiles & Sports Goods:** Integrated Textile Programme with **Mega Textile Parks** and dedicated sports goods R&D.

Rare Earth Corridors?

Dedicated corridors in **Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu** for critical mineral security:

- **Objective:** End-to-end ecosystem for mining, processing, R&D, and manufacturing of rare earth elements (REE) essential for EVs, wind turbines, mobile phones, and defence electronics.
- **Key Allocations:**
 - Basic customs duty exemption on capital goods for critical mineral processing.
 - Extension of **Section 51** tax benefits for prospecting/exploration (adding critical minerals to Schedule XII).
 - Scrapping of 2.5% duty on **monazite** (used for high-end permanent magnets).
- **Andhra Pradesh Focus:** Nearly **16,000 hectares** earmarked along coastal corridor (Srikakulam to Nellore) for heavy mineral sands (Monazite, Ilmenite, Rutile, Zircon, Garnet).
- **Strategic Context:** Addresses global supply chain disruptions, particularly China export curbs on rare earth permanent magnets.

Record Defence Outlay?

- **Total Allocation:** **₹7.85 lakh crore** (↑ 15.19% YoY), ~2% of GDP, representing **14.67%** of Union expenditure (highest among Ministries).
- **Capital Expenditure:** **₹2.19 lakh crore** (↑ ~22%).
- **Indigenisation Focus:** **₹1.39 lakh crore (75%)** of **₹1.85 lakh crore** capital acquisitions earmarked for domestic procurement.
- **Key Measures:**
 - Basic customs duty exemption on aircraft components/engines and MRO raw materials for Defence PSUs.
 - CIE manufacturing scheme including tunnel-boring equipment for strategic infrastructure.
 - Customs duty exemption for critical minerals and rare earth magnets processing.
 - Nuclear project exemptions extended until **2035**.
- **Welfare:** Tax exemption for disability pensions (service + disability elements) for armed forces/paramilitary personnel invalidated due to service-attributable disability.

Livestock & Fisheries Growth?

Allocation for Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, and Dairying increased to **₹8,915.26 crore** (+26.7%), acknowledging sectors as main drivers of agricultural growth (**4.6%** in FY26 vs. ~3.5% for traditional crops):

- **Livestock:**

- **20,000+ veterinary professionals** target through loan-linked subsidy for private colleges/hospitals.
- **Rashtriya Gokul Mission: ₹800 crore** for indigenous cattle breed productivity.
- **Entrepreneurship Development: ₹500 crore** credit-linked subsidy for startups and Livestock FPOs.
- Tax relief for cooperatives on cattle feed and inter-cooperative dividends.
- **Fisheries (Highest-ever ₹2,761.80 crore):**
 - Integrated development of **500 reservoirs and Amrit Sarovars**.
 - Strengthening coastal value chains through **women-led groups** and **200+ fisheries startups**.
 - **Export Reforms:**
 - Duty-free input import limit raised to **3%** of export turnover (from 1%).
 - Fish caught in **EEZ/high seas** made duty-free.
 - Removal of **₹10 lakh courier export cap** for e-commerce access.

Education & Skill Reforms?

Structural reforms aligned with **NEP 2020** and **Viksit Bharat** vision:

- **Governance:**
 - **High-Powered Standing Committee on 'Education to Employment and Enterprise':** Target **10% global services share by 2047**.
 - AI impact assessment and curriculum embedding from school level.
 - **5 University Townships** near industrial/logistic corridors.
- **Future Skills:**
 - **AVGC Content Creator Labs** in **15,000 schools** and **500 colleges**.
 - **Corporate Mitras** by ICAI/ICSI for MSME compliance in Tier-II/III towns.
 - **Samarth 2.0:** Modernised textile skilling through industry-academia collaboration.
- **Healthcare Education:**
 - **100,000 Allied Health Professionals** over 5 years in 10 disciplines.
 - **5 lakh caregivers** trained in wellness, yoga, and medical device operation.
 - **3 new All India Institutes of Ayurveda;** upgraded WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre (Jamnagar).
- **Inclusivity:**
 - **1 girls' hostel per district** for STEM promotion.
 - **Divyangjan Kaushal Yojana:** Training for persons with disabilities in IT, AVGC, Hospitality.

Heatwaves & Lightning as National Disasters?

16th Finance Commission (Chair: **Arvind Panagariya**) recommends inclusion under **Disaster Management Act, 2005:**

- **Data Context:**
 - **2024:** Warmest year since 1901; **50°C+** temperatures in Delhi/Rajasthan.
 - **446 heatwave days** in 2024 (highest since 2000).

- **Lightning:** 400% rise in strikes (2019-2025); **35%** of all disaster-related fatalities.
- **Current Constraint:** States limited to **10% of SDRF** for "local disasters," forcing development fund diversion.
- **Benefits of National Status:**
 - Access to **NDRF** for relief and mitigation.
 - Uniform **ex-gratia compensation** across states.
 - Legal enforcement of work stoppages for outdoor workers.
 - Funding for cooling shelters, cool roofs, lightning protection infrastructure.
 - Mandatory early warning accountability.
- **Challenges:** Attribution of heat deaths, financial burden (potential **₹120 crore+** annual lightning compensation), widespread occurrence, rural data accuracy.

Additional Info

- **Finance Commission (Article 280):** Constitutional body recommending Centre-State tax sharing and disaster grants. 16th Commission tenure begins April 2026.
- **Disaster Management:**
 - **NDMA:** National Disaster Management Authority under DM Act, 2005.
 - **Funds:** SDRF (State Disaster Response Fund), NDRF (National Disaster Response Fund).
 - **Existing Initiatives:** Heat Action Plans (23 states), MPLS (Mitigation Project on Lightning Safety), CAP (Common Alert Protocol) for geo-targeted SMS alerts.
- **Critical Minerals:** 17 rare earth elements essential for clean energy, electronics, and defence. India holds ~6% of global reserves but <1% of production.
- **NIPERs:** National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research under Department of Pharmaceuticals.
- **Biopharma Context:** SHAKTI targets non-communicable diseases responsible for ~65% of India's disease burden.

World Bank Approves \$830 Million Loan to Modernize India's Skill Training Ecosystem

What's the News?

- The **World Bank** has approved an **\$830 million loan** to support the Government of India's **Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation through Upgraded ITIs (PM-SETU)** program.
- The initiative aims to overhaul India's network of **Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)** and **National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs)** to align vocational training with modern labor market demands.
- The program is designed to produce more than **one million better-skilled workers** annually and significantly improve the job placement rate of vocational graduates, which currently stands at less than 50%.
- This project was prepared jointly with the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** as part of a larger **\$4**

billion investment plan by the Indian government to upgrade its skilling infrastructure.

The PM-SETU Program?

- **Infrastructure Revamp:** The program focuses on modernizing facilities, equipment, and digital systems in ITIs across the country to meet international industry standards.
- **Hub-and-Spoke Model:** ITIs will be transformed into specialized "**Centers of Excellence**" using a cluster-based approach, where main hubs provide resources and training to surrounding spoke institutes.
- **Industry-Driven Curricula:** Training will transition from traditional methods to a more balanced mix of **consultancy, production, and high-tech training** (e.g., renewable energy, electric mobility, and advanced manufacturing).
- **Financial Sustainability:** The program encourages ITIs to generate their own revenue through specialized training services and production functions, reducing long-term dependence on government grants.

Key Targets and Financials?

- **Gender Inclusion:** A primary objective is to increase female participation in traditionally male-dominated trades (like welding and mechanics), with a target to ensure at least **25% of ITI students are women** within five years.
- **Loan Details:** The **\$830 million** loan has a final maturity period of **19.5 years**, which includes a **four-year grace period**.
- **Private Sector Participation:** The program aims to mobilize at least **\$680 million in private capital** to bring industry expertise and investment directly into the vocational training system.
- **Youth Focus:** With youth accounting for roughly **72% of the unemployed** in India, the program prioritizes reducing the "skills mismatch" to enhance productivity and national earnings.

Additional Info

- **World Bank Country Partnership Framework (CPF):**
 - The loan is a key component of the new **CPF for India**, which envisages **\$8-10 billion** in annual financing over the next five years.
 - The framework prioritizes private sector-led job creation and human capital investment to support the **Viksit Bharat 2047** vision.
- **International Collaboration:**
 - The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** is co-financing the initiative, having previously approved an **\$846 million loan** for similar upgrades to 650 ITIs across 12 states.
- **Institutional Framework:**
 - The program is managed by the **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE)**.
 - It builds upon previous successful schemes like **STRIVE** (Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement) and **SANKALP** (Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion).
- **Data Points:**

- India sees approximately **12 million people** entering the labor market every year.
- The total outlay for the **PM-SETU** scheme is estimated at **₹60,000 crore**.

16th Finance Commission Report: Key Recommendations for 2026-31

What's the News?

- The **16th Finance Commission (16th FC)**, chaired by **Dr. Arvind Panagariya**, submitted its report for the award period **2026-31**, which was tabled in Parliament alongside the **Union Budget 2026-27**.
- The Commission retains states' share in the **divisible pool of central taxes at 41%**, unchanged from the 15th FC.
- However, it introduces significant shifts in **horizontal devolution criteria**, replacing the **tax effort parameter** with a new **contribution to GDP** criterion, and emphasizes **performance-based fiscal transfers** to local bodies.
- The report signals a move toward "**compliance-driven fiscal federalism**", linking grants to governance reforms and fiscal discipline.

Vertical Devolution: States' Share in Central Taxes

- **States' Share:** Retained at **41%** of the divisible pool (same as 15th FC).
- **Divisible Pool:** Calculated after excluding **cesses, surcharges**, and cost of collection from gross central tax revenue.
- **Rationale:** Maintains stability in inter-governmental fiscal transfers while the Centre retains resources for national priorities.

Horizontal Devolution: Revised Distribution Formula

The Commission recalibrated weights for distributing the 41% share among states, introducing a **new economic performance criterion** and modifying existing parameters:

Criteria	15th FC Weight	16th FC Weight	Key Change
Income Distance	45%	42.5%	Reduced by 2.5 percentage points
Population (2011 Census)	15%	17.5%	Increased by 2.5 percentage points
Demographic Performance	12.5%	10%	Redefined from TFR to population growth (1971-2011)
Area	15%	10%	Reduced by 5 percentage points
Forest & Ecology	10%	10%	Now includes open forests and growth in forest cover (2015-23)

Criteria	15th FC Weight	16th FC Weight	Key Change
Tax and Fiscal Efforts	2.5%	0%	Dropped entirely
Contribution to GDP	0%	10%	New parameter rewarding economic output

Changes Explained

- **Income Distance:** Gap between a state's per capita GSDP and the average of the **top three large states** (calculated using 2018-19 and 2023-24 data, excluding pandemic year 2020-21). Lower per capita GSDP states receive higher shares.
- **Contribution to GDP:** New 10% weight calculated as the square root of a state's GSDP relative to the sum of square roots of all states' GSDP. **Rewards economically productive states**, replacing the tax effort incentive.
- **Demographic Performance:** Now based on **population growth between 1971-2011** instead of Total Fertility Rate (TFR), continuing to reward states with successful population control.
- **Forest & Ecology:** Expanded to include **open forests** (previously only dense/moderately dense) and **increase in forest cover between 2015-2023**.

Grants-in-Aid: ₹9.47 Lakh Crore Total

The Commission streamlined grants by **discontinuing** revenue deficit grants, sector-specific grants, and state-specific grants, focusing instead on **local bodies and disaster management**.

Local Body Grants (₹7.91 Lakh Crore)

- **Rural Local Bodies:** ₹4.35 lakh crore
- **Urban Local Bodies:** ₹3.56 lakh crore

Structure:

- **Basic Grants (80%):**
 - **50% untied** (flexible use)
 - **50% tied** to sanitation, solid waste management, and/or water management
- **Performance Grants (20%):** Linked to:
 - State-level reforms (minimum benchmark for transfers to local bodies from state resources)
 - Local body-level outcomes (own source revenue achievement)

Entry Conditions (mandatory for receiving grants):

- Constitution of local bodies as per 74th/73rd Amendment
- Public disclosure of provisional and audited accounts
- Timely constitution of **State Finance Commissions**

New Urban-Specific Grants:

- **Special Infrastructure Grant:** ₹56,100 crore for **wastewater management** in cities with **10-40 lakh population** (2011 Census).
- **Urbanisation Premium:** ₹10,000 crore one-time grant for:
 - Merging peri-urban villages into Urban Local Bodies
 - Formulating **Rural-to-Urban Transition Policy**

Disaster Management Grants (₹1.55 Lakh Crore)

- **Corpus:** ₹2,04,401 crore total for **State Disaster Response Funds (SDRF)** and **State Disaster Mitigation Funds (SDMF)**.
- **Centre's Share:** ₹1,55,916 crore.
- **Cost-Sharing Ratio:**
 - **90:10** for North-Eastern and Himalayan states
 - **75:25** for all other states

Fiscal Discipline and Reform Recommendations

Fiscal Roadmap

- **Centre's Fiscal Deficit:** Reduce to **3.5% of GDP by 2030-31**.
- **State's Fiscal Deficit:** Cap at **3% of GSDP** annually.
- **Off-Budget Borrowings:** **Strictly discontinue**. All such liabilities must be brought onto budgets; debt definition expanded uniformly.
- **Combined Debt Projection:** Decline from **77.3% of GDP (2026-27)** to **73.1% (2030-31)**.

Sector-Specific Reforms

Power Sector:

- States to actively pursue **privatisation of DISCOMs** (distribution companies).
- **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** to warehouse existing DISCOM debt, shielding private investors.
- **Special Assistance Scheme for Capital Investment** funds usable **only after privatisation completion**.

Subsidy Rationalisation:

- Review **unconditional cash transfers**, which now account for **47.4%** of large-group schemes (up from 3% in 2018-19).
- Set **clear exclusion criteria** and rigorous review processes.
- Discontinue **off-budget financing** of subsidies.
- Adopt **uniform accounting standards** for subsidies and transfers across states.

Public Sector Enterprises:

- Close **308 inactive State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs)**.
- Formulate **state-level disinvestment policies** for underperforming PSEs.
- PSEs with losses in **3 out of 4 consecutive years** must be placed before Cabinet for closure, privatisation, or strategic continuation decisions.

Transparency Measures

- **CAG-Certified Data:** Centre to annually disclose **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)-certified data on net tax proceeds** under **Article 279**, ensuring transparency in divisible pool calculations.

Constitutional Framework

- **Article 280:** Mandates Finance Commission constitution every five years to recommend Centre-State fiscal relations.
- **Article 270:** Defines the divisible pool of taxes.
- **Article 275:** Provides for grants-in-aid to states.
- **73rd and 74th Amendments:** Constitutional status for Panchayats and Municipalities, forming basis for local body grants.

Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0: ₹10,000 Crore Boost for Deep-Tech Innovation

What's the News?

- The **Union Cabinet** has approved **Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 (FoF 2.0)** with a corpus of **₹10,000 crore** to mobilize long-term venture capital for India's expanding startup ecosystem.
- The scheme aims to catalyze the next phase of startup growth by providing **patient capital** to deep-tech ventures, innovative manufacturing, and early-growth enterprises.
- This initiative marks a strategic shift from ecosystem creation (under FoF 1.0) to targeted support for high-risk, innovation-led sectors requiring sustained funding.

Features & Objectives

- **Corpus:** ₹10,000 crore government-backed fund to crowd-in private venture capital investment.
- **Fund Structure:** Operates on **Fund of Funds model** invests in **SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)**, which then deploy capital into startups, rather than direct startup funding.
- **Target Sectors:**
 - **Deep-tech:** AI, robotics, advanced computing, semiconductors.
 - **Innovative manufacturing:** Technology-driven production systems.
 - **Clean-tech:** Climate and energy technologies.
 - **Early-growth startups:** Preventing "valley of death" funding gaps.
- **Geographic Focus:** Encourages investment beyond metro hubs (Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Mumbai) to build distributed innovation ecosystems.
- **Domestic VC Strengthening:** Special emphasis on supporting smaller, India-based venture funds to reduce reliance on foreign capital.

Additional Info

- **FoF 1.0 Performance (2016–2024):**
 - ₹10,000 crore committed to **145 AIFs**
 - ₹25,500+ crore invested in **1,370+ startups**
 - Covered sectors: AI & robotics, clean-tech, fintech, space-tech, biotechnology, agriculture, healthcare
- **Startup India Context:**
 - Recognized startups grew from **fewer than 500 (2016)** to **over 2 lakh (2025)**
 - **2025** recorded highest-ever annual startup registrations
- **Implementing Body:** **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- **Regulatory Framework:** Operates under **SEBI AIF Regulations, 2012** and **Startup India Action Plan (2016)**

UPI Overtakes Cash as India's Most Preferred Payment Mode

What's the News?

- **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** has emerged as the most preferred mode of transaction in India, accounting for **57%** of total payment transactions among surveyed users, surpassing **cash at 38%**.
- The findings are from a **socio-economic impact analysis** released by the **Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance**, during the **Chintan Shivir** held in February 2026.
- The report evaluates the effectiveness of the government's **Incentive Scheme for Promotion of RuPay Debit Card and low-value BHIM-UPI (Person-to-Merchant) transactions**, implemented from **FY 2021–22 through FY 2024–25**.

Findings of the Survey?

Methodology

- **Sample Size:** **10,378 respondents** across **15 states**.
- **Respondent Categories:** 6,167 users, 2,199 merchants, and 2,012 service providers.
- **Geographical Coverage:** Five zones – North, South, East, West, and North-East.
- **Locations:** Urban and semi-urban areas.
- **Fieldwork Period:** July 22 to August 25, 2025.
- **Method:** Face-to-face Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI).

User Behaviour

- **Daily Usage:** **65%** of UPI users report multiple digital transactions per day.
- **Youth Adoption:** **66%** adoption rate among **18–25 age group**, indicating strong shift toward digital-first financial habits.
- **Confidence:** **90%** of users reported increased confidence in digital payments after using UPI and RuPay cards.
- **Motivators:**
 - **52%** cited **cashback incentives** as key motivation.
 - **74%** identified **speed of payment** as primary advantage.
- **Cash Decline:** Marked reduction in cash usage and ATM withdrawals observed.

Merchant Adoption

- **Near-Universal Acceptance:** **94%** of small merchants now accept UPI payments.
- **Satisfaction:** **72%** expressed satisfaction with digital payments.
- **Benefits Cited:** Faster transactions, improved record-keeping, operational convenience.
- **Business Impact:** **57%** reported increase in sales following digital adoption.

Infrastructure Growth and Scale?

Transaction Growth

- **11-Fold Increase:** Digital transactions increased nearly **11 times** during the scheme period
- **UPI Dominance:** UPI's share in total digital transactions surged to **~80%**.
- **Monthly Records:**

- **January 2026: 21.70 billion transactions** worth ₹28.33 lakh crore.
- **December 2025: 21.63 billion transactions** worth ₹27.97 lakh crore.
- **Average daily transactions: 700 million** (January 2026).

Infrastructure Expansion

- **UPI QR Codes:** Deployment expanded dramatically from **9.3 crore** to **65.8 crore**.
- **Bank Participation:** Banks on UPI platform increased from **216** (March 2021) to **661** (March 2025).
- **Third-Party Apps:** Rebounded from **16** to **38** providers.
- **Annual Volume (2025):** Approximately **228 billion transactions**.

Government Investment

- **Total Budgetary Support: ₹8,276 crore**
- **Year-wise Disbursements:**
 - **FY 2021–22:** ₹1,389 crore.
 - **FY 2022–23:** ₹2,210 crore.
 - **FY 2023–24:** ₹3,631 crore.
 - **FY 2024–25:** ₹1,046 crore.

Additional Info

UPI Architecture

- **Operator: National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** – umbrella organisation for retail payments under **RBI** and **IBA** guidance.
- **Launch: April 2016** (pilot), enabling instant bank-to-bank transfers using mobile numbers or QR codes.
- **Components:**
 - **BHIM-UPI:** Government-backed app.
 - **Third-Party Apps:** PhonePe, Google Pay, Paytm, and others.
 - **RuPay:** Domestic card network integrated with UPI.

Policy Framework

- **Digital India Programme:** UPI serves as cornerstone for less-cash economy vision.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY):** Linked accounts enable direct benefit transfers and digital payments.
- **Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007:** Regulatory framework governing NPCI operations.

Comparative Metrics (H1 2025)

- **UPI Share: 84.8%** of total retail digital payment volumes.
- **Value Share: 9.1%** of total retail digital payment value (indicating high-frequency, low-ticket nature).
- **Average Ticket Size:** Declining trend showing penetration into micro-payments.

RBI Mandates Unique Transaction Identifier (UTI) for OTC Derivatives

What's the News?

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has issued a revised directive mandating the use of a **Unique Transaction Identifier (UTI)** for all **Over-the-Counter (OTC)** derivative transactions.
- The implementation deadline for this framework has been set for **January 1, 2027**, providing financial

institutions additional time to align their reporting systems with global standards.

- The move aims to enhance transparency, improve risk monitoring, and prevent the double-counting of trades in the derivatives market.

What is UTI?

The **Unique Transaction Identifier** is a globally recognized key data element for reporting OTC derivative transactions, designed to enable policymakers to aggregate and monitor market-wide exposures. While the Legal Entity Identifier (LEI) uniquely identifies counterparties, the **UTI acts as a single reference number for each transaction**, allowing regulators to obtain a comprehensive view of the OTC derivatives market.

Scope of Application

The mandate applies to all transactions in OTC markets for:

- Rupee interest rate derivatives
- Forward contracts in government securities
- Foreign currency derivatives
- Foreign currency interest rate derivatives
- Credit derivatives

All these are currently reported to the **Trade Repository managed by Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL-TR)**.

Implementation Details

Aspect	Specification
Effective Date	January 1, 2027 (deferred from April 1, 2026)
Applicability	Only to transactions entered into on or after January 1, 2027
Retroactivity	Outstanding contracts prior to implementation date exempt
UTI Structure	Maximum 52 characters comprising LEI of generating entity + unique identifier
Reporting Window	Five business days from transaction date (extended from proposed two days)

Operational Framework

Waterfall Mechanism: The RBI retained the proposed hierarchy for UTI generation, setting out the order of entities responsible for generating the identifier. While some stakeholders suggested mandating electronic trading platforms (ETPs) to generate UTIs, the regulator declined to prescribe a single entity, maintaining flexibility.

Temporary UTI Provision: Market participants may generate and report a **temporary UTI** to the trade repository if the final UTI is not available from the counterparty at the time of reporting.

Multi-Jurisdictional Trades: For transactions reportable in multiple jurisdictions where there is no earlier foreign reporting deadline, the UTI-generating entity may be mutually agreed upon by counterparties. A similar provision applies to trades reportable only in India.

Lifecycle Events:

- Modifications to contract details → Treated as **updates** (no new UTI required)

- Novation resulting in new reportable derivative contract
→ **Fresh UTI required**

Vendor Restrictions

The RBI explicitly prohibited delegation of UTI generation to vendors where the LEI embedded in the UTI would be that of the vendor, ensuring accountability remains with the actual trading entities.

Government Launches 7 New Interventions Under ₹25,060 Crore Export Promotion Mission

What's the News?

Union Commerce and Industry Minister **Piyush Goyal** launched **seven new interventions** under the **Export Promotion Mission (EPM)**, a **₹25,060 crore** initiative announced in **Union Budget 2025-26**. With this launch, **10 of 11 proposed EPM interventions** are now operational. The mission aims to empower **MSMEs** to overcome structural barriers—high capital costs, logistics disadvantages, and compliance challenges—and integrate into global value chains.

Export Promotion Mission: Overview

Financial Outlay & Duration

- **Total Outlay:** ₹25,060 crore over **6 years** (FY 2025-26 to FY 2030-31).
- **Allocation Split:**
 - **Niryat Protsahan** (Financial Enablers): ₹10,400 crore.
 - **Niryat Disha** (Non-Financial Enablers): ₹14,660 crore.

Implementing Framework

- **Nodal Agency:** Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).
- **Anchoring Ministry:** Department of Commerce.
- **Coordinating Bodies:** MSME Ministry, Finance Ministry, Export Promotion Councils, State Governments.

The 7 New Interventions

Under Niryat Protsahan (Financial Support)

- **Export Factoring Support**
 - **Interest subvention** of **2.75%** on export factoring costs.
 - Cap: **₹50 lakh** per MSME annually.
 - Purpose: Convert foreign receivables into immediate cash flow without traditional loan dependency.
- **E-Commerce Credit Facilities**
 - **Direct E-Commerce Credit:** Up to **₹50 lakh** with **90% guarantee** coverage.
 - **Overseas Inventory Credit:** Up to **₹5 crore** with **75% guarantee** coverage.
 - Interest subvention of **2.75%** (capped at ₹15 lakh/year).
- **Emerging Export Opportunities**
 - Credit enhancement and shared-risk instruments for accessing **new/high-risk markets**.
 - Reduces financial risks in unexplored territories.

Under Niryat Disha (Ecosystem Support)

- **TRACE (Trade Regulations, Accreditation & Compliance Enablement)**
 - Reimbursement for testing, inspection, certification costs:
 - **60%** under Positive List.
 - **75%** under Priority Positive List.
 - Annual cap: **₹25 lakh** per Importer-Exporter Code (IEC).
- **FLOW (Facilitating Logistics, Overseas Warehousing & Fulfilment)**
 - Support for overseas warehouses and **e-commerce export hubs**.
 - Assistance: Up to **30%** of approved project cost for **3 years**.
- **LIFT (Logistics Interventions for Freight & Transport)**
 - Targets **low export-intensity districts** and **landlocked/hilly regions** (especially Northeast).
 - Reimbursement: Up to **30%** of freight costs.
 - Annual cap: **₹20 lakh** per IEC.
- **INSIGHT (Integrated Support for Trade Intelligence & Facilitation)**
 - Strengthens **Districts as Export Hubs** initiative.
 - Financial assistance: Up to **50%** of project cost; **100%** for government institutions/Indian Missions abroad.

National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0: ₹16.72 Lakh Crore Asset Monetisation Roadmap

What's the News?

- Union Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** launched the **National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0 (NMP 2.0)**, a medium-term roadmap for monetising operational public infrastructure assets.
- Developed by **NITI Aayog** in consultation with infrastructure line ministries, the pipeline targets an aggregate monetisation potential of **₹16.72 lakh crore** over a five-year period.
- The initiative aims to unlock value from brownfield assets to fund new infrastructure projects under the **Viksit Bharat** mission, while minimising direct budgetary expenditure.

NMP 2.0: Key Targets & Timeline

- **Overview:** A structured guidance framework providing visibility to private investors on potential public assets for monetisation through leasing, investment trusts, or other instruments.
- **Monetisation Value:**
 - Total estimated potential: **₹16.72 lakh crore** (FY 2026–2030).
 - Includes **₹5.8 lakh crore** as direct private sector investment.
- **Strategic Objective:** Enable **asset recycling**—redeploying capital from mature assets into new infrastructure—to accelerate capital expenditure without escalating fiscal deficit.

Sector-wise Allocation (Indicative)

- **Highways, MMLPs, Ropeways:** ₹4.42 lakh crore (largest share).
- **Power:** ₹2.77 lakh crore.
- **Ports:** ₹2.64 lakh crore.
- **Railways:** ₹2.62 lakh crore.
- **Coal:** ₹2.16 lakh crore.
- **Mines:** ₹1.00 lakh crore.
- **Other Sectors:** Petroleum & gas, civil aviation, warehousing, urban infrastructure, telecom, and tourism.

Governance & Fund Flow Mechanism

- **Implementation:** Led by **Central ministries** and **Public Sector Entities (PSEs)**, guided by the **Ministry of Finance**.
- **Monitoring:** Progress tracked by the **Core Group of Secretaries on Asset Monetisation (CGAM)** under the Cabinet Secretary.
- **Proceeds Allocation:** Funds flow to four channels based on asset ownership and monetisation mode:
 - **Consolidated Fund of India** (primary recipient).
 - **PSU/Port Authority** accounts for reinvestment.
 - **State Consolidated Funds** (for state-linked assets).
 - **Direct private investment** in asset upgrades/expansion.

RBI Establishes Secure Greenfield Data Centre to Mitigate Strategic Risks

What's the News?

- The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** is setting up a state-of-the-art **Greenfield Data Centre** to enhance the resilience of the country's financial digital infrastructure.
- The facility is specifically designed to protect critical financial data from both natural disasters and potential man-made or geopolitical threats.
- The project aims to provide a secure and scalable environment for the central bank's growing computing and data storage needs.

Strategic Location & Security Features

- **Seismic Resilience:** The centre is situated in a low-seismic activity zone to ensure operations remain unaffected by major earthquakes.
- **Geopolitical Safety:** The site is located deep within the Indian mainland, keeping it far from international borders to minimize risks from cross-border strikes or external physical threats.
- **Disaster Recovery:** It will function as a major hub alongside existing facilities in **Mumbai** and **Delhi**, creating a robust redundant network for the nation's payment systems.
- **Data Sovereignty:** The move reinforces **Data Localisation** norms, ensuring that sensitive financial information is stored and processed exclusively within India.

Greenfield Data Centre Objectives

- **Operational Continuity:** Designed to ensure that essential services like **RTGS (Real Time Gross Settlement)** and **NEFT (National Electronic Funds Transfer)** remain operational even during catastrophic failures at other nodes.
- **Future-Ready Infrastructure:** The facility is built to handle the massive surge in digital transactions, which have seen a significant **CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate)** over the last few years.
- **Energy Efficiency:** As a "Greenfield" project (built from scratch), it incorporates modern, energy-efficient cooling systems and high-density server architecture to reduce the environmental footprint.

Additional Info

Global and Domestic Trends

- **International Model:** Similar to **US Federal Reserve's East Rutherford Operations Center**, which houses key payment and settlement infrastructure with layered protections
- **Domestic Adoption:** Other institutions building own data centres:
 - **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)**
 - **State Bank of India (SBI)**

Data Centre Tiers Explained

- **Tier I:** Basic capacity with single path for power and cooling
- **Tier II:** Redundant capacity components
- **Tier III:** Concurrently maintainable, no shutdowns required for maintenance
- **Tier IV:** Fault-tolerant, independent systems, highest availability (**99.995% uptime guarantee**)

India Unveils New GDP Series with 2022-23 Base Year

What's the News?

The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** released a new **GDP series with FY 2022-23 as the base year**, replacing the decade-old 2011-12 benchmark. This comprehensive revision introduces significant methodological improvements to better capture India's evolving economic structure, including the digital economy, gig work, and post-pandemic consumption patterns.

Key Highlights:

- **Real GDP growth for FY 2025-26** estimated at **7.6%** (upward revision from previous estimates)
- **Nominal GDP** projected to reach **₹345.47 lakh crore** in FY 2025-26
- **Manufacturing sector** recorded double-digit growth in FY 2023-24 and FY 2024-25
- **Secondary and Tertiary sectors** registered above **9% growth** in FY 2024-25

Why the New Base Year?

Overview: Base years are updated periodically to reflect structural changes in the economy. The 2011-12 base year became outdated as it failed to capture:

- The rise of the **digital economy** and platform services

- **GST implementation** (2017) and its impact on tax data
- **Post-COVID consumption patterns** and gig economy expansion
- Modern industrial technologies and service sector evolution

Selection Rationale:

- **FY 2022-23** chosen as it represents a "**recent normal year**" post-COVID with robust, comprehensive data availability
- **2017-18** rejected due to GST introduction disruption
- **2019-20 to 2021-22** excluded due to pandemic impact and rebound effects

Key Methodological Changes?

1. Advanced Inflation Adjustment (Deflation)

- **Granular deflators:** Price indicators expanded from **~180 to ~600**, using specific **CPI and WPI** components
- **Double deflation:** Applied to **agriculture and manufacturing sectors**—inputs and outputs deflated separately to prevent profit fluctuations from being misread as production growth
- **Sector-specific indices:** Replaced composite economy-wide indices with targeted, industry-specific price indicators

2. Enhanced Data Sources & Big Data Integration

- **GST data:** Primary tool for cross-validating corporate growth and regional economic allocation
- **e-Vahan data:** Precise measurement of road transport services
- **PFMS (Public Finance Management System):** Real-time tracking of government expenditure
- **ASUSE and PLFS:** Annual surveys replacing old proxy data for unincorporated sector and household activity
- **Gig economy tracking:** New codes for platform workers (delivery partners, aggregator drivers)

3. Structural Consistency Improvements

- **Supply and Use Tables (SUT):** Integrated framework to reduce discrepancies between production-side and expenditure-side GDP estimates
- **Proportional Denton method:** Replaced pro-rata benchmarking to eliminate artificial quarterly spikes ("step problem")
- **Refined PFCE estimation: Triangulated approach** using surveys, commodity flow, and production data; aligned with **COICOP 2018** international standards
- **FISIM-based approach:** For financial services valuation (Financial Intermediation Services Indirectly Measured)

4. Improved Corporate Classification

- **Activity-wise turnover data:** Companies classified by specific economic activities rather than dominant business segment
- **Multi-activity enterprise segregation:** Better capture of diversified corporate operations

Additional Info

Historical Base Year Revisions:

- **2011-12:** Previous base year (replaced 2004-05)

- **2022-23:** Current revision (follows international best practice of periodic updates)

Key Economic Indicators (New Series):

- **GDP (Constant Prices):**
 - FY 2022-23: ₹261.18 lakh crore (base)
 - FY 2023-24: ₹280.01 lakh crore (7.2% growth)
 - FY 2024-25: ₹299.89 lakh crore (7.1% growth)
 - FY 2025-26: ₹322.58 lakh crore (7.6% growth)
- **Per Capita Income (Current Prices):**
 - FY 2022-23: ₹1,59,557
 - FY 2023-24: ₹1,76,465
 - FY 2024-25: ₹1,92,774
- **Gross Capital Formation to GDP Ratio:** 34.3% (FY 2024-25)

Sectoral Growth (FY 2024-25):

- **Primary Sector:** 4.9%
- **Secondary Sector:** 8.0%
- **Tertiary Sector:** 7.9%

Upcoming Releases:

- **Back series data:** Expected by December 2026
- **Detailed methodology report:** To be released in coming months

Constitutional & Legal Framework:

- **Article 266:** Consolidated Fund of India (relevant for PFMS integration)
- **Article 280:** Finance Commission (uses GDP data for tax devolution)
- **Collection of Statistics Act, 2008:** Legal backing for surveys

National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) Upgraded to Schedule 'A' Category CPSE

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)** has officially upgraded the **National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC)** from a **Schedule 'B'** to a **Schedule 'A'** Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE).
- This elevation recognizes NSIC's sustained financial performance, operational excellence, and its pivotal role in the growth of the **MSME sector** in India.
- The upgrade followed a recommendation by the **Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB)** and approval from the **Department of Public Enterprises (DPE)**.

Significance of Schedule 'A' Status?

- **Financial Autonomy:** The upgrade grants the **NSIC Board** significantly higher powers for capital expenditure (**CAPEX**) and investment decisions without requiring prior government approval.
- **Organizational Structure:** It allows for the creation of higher-level executive positions and enhances the pay scales for senior management, helping the corporation attract and retain top-tier talent.
- **Global Competitiveness:** With **Schedule 'A'** status, NSIC is better positioned to enter into international joint ventures and large-scale strategic partnerships to support Indian small businesses globally.
- **Path to Navratna:** This classification is a critical step for a CPSE to eventually qualify for **Navratna** status,

provided it meets other financial benchmarks like being a **Miniratna Category-I** enterprise.

Performance and Operational Metrics?

- **Consistent Profitability:** The upgrade was driven by NSIC's ability to maintain a healthy **Net Worth** and consistent dividend payments to the Government of India.
- **MoU Ratings:** NSIC has frequently secured '**Excellent**' or '**Very Good**' ratings in the annual Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) performance evaluations conducted by the government.
- **Market Impact:** The corporation has expanded its footprint through digital platforms and a vast network of technical centers, supporting millions of MSMEs through raw material procurement and marketing assistance.

Additional Info

- **About NSIC:**
 - **Established: 1955** as an ISO 9001:2015 certified Government of India Enterprise.
 - **Core Objective:** To promote, aid, and foster the growth of **MSMEs** across the country.
 - **Key Schemes:**
 - **Single Point Registration Scheme (SPRS):** Facilitates MSME participation in government procurement.
 - **Raw Material Assistance (RMA):** Provides credit and bulk purchase benefits for essential raw materials.
 - **MSME Global Mart:** A B2B web portal providing end-to-end marketing solutions.
- **Classification of CPSEs:**
 - CPSEs are categorized into four schedules (**A, B, C, and D**) based on quantitative factors (turnover, investment, capital employed) and qualitative factors (strategic importance, number of employees).
 - **Schedule 'A'** is the highest category, reserved for enterprises with the largest scale of operations and strategic impact.

Indian Scientists Develop Integrated Solar Energy Capture and Storage Device

What's the News?

- Scientists at the **Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS)**, Bengaluru, have developed a breakthrough **single-unit device** that simultaneously harvests and stores solar energy.
- Known as a **photo-rechargeable supercapacitor** (or photo-capacitor), it eliminates the need for separate solar panels and batteries, which are standard in conventional solar systems.
- The project was supported by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)**, under the **Ministry of Science and Technology**.

The Photo-Rechargeable Supercapacitor

- **Integrated Architecture:** Unlike traditional setups that require complex power management electronics to bridge the gap between energy generation (PV panels) and storage (batteries), this device combines both functions into a **single integrated system**.
- **Material Innovation:**
 - The device uses binder-free **Nickel-Cobalt Oxide (NiCo₂O₄)** nanowires.
 - These nanowires are grown on **nickel foam** using an *in situ* hydrothermal process, creating a highly porous and conductive 3D network.
- **Dual Functionality:** This unique structure allows the material to act as both a **solar energy harvester** and a **supercapacitor electrode** at the same time.

Performance and Efficiency

- **Capacitance Boost:** Under solar illumination, the electrode showed a **54% increase** in capacitance (rising from 570 to 880 mF cm⁻²).
- **Stability and Durability:**
 - **Retention:** Maintained **88% capacitance** even after **1,000 photo-charging cycles**.
 - **Longevity:** The electrode retained **85%** of its original capacity after **10,000 charge-discharge cycles**, indicating high mechanical and electrochemical stability.
- **Output:** The asymmetric prototype delivered a stable output voltage of **1.2 volts**.
- **Versatility:** The device operates efficiently under a wide range of lighting, from **low indoor illumination** to intense sunlight.

Additional Info

- **Scientific Mechanism:**
 - A theoretical study published in **Sustainable Energy & Fuels** (Royal Society of Chemistry) revealed that nickel substitution narrows the material's **band gap** to ~1.67 eV.
 - It induces **half-metallic behavior**, where the material acts as a semiconductor for one electron spin and a metal for the other, enabling faster charge transport.
- **Centre for Nano and Soft Matter Sciences (CeNS):**

- An autonomous research institute under the **DST**, Government of India.
- It focuses on fundamental and applied research in **nanoscience** and **soft matter**, including liquid crystals, polymers, and energy materials.

Moltbook Security Breach: Massive Exposure of AI Agent and User Data

What's the News?

- **Moltbook**, an experimental social network designed exclusively for **AI agents**, suffered a major security breach that exposed sensitive credentials and personal data.
- The vulnerability was uncovered by cybersecurity firm **Wiz**, which identified a severely misconfigured database that was accessible without any authentication.
- The breach revealed that the platform, which gained viral popularity for its "autonomous" AI interactions, had significant structural flaws and lacked basic security controls.
- The incident has sparked a global debate on the risks of **"vibe coding"**—building complex software using AI assistants without formal security audits or manual code review.

Scope of the Data Exposure

- **API Authentication Tokens:** Approximately **1.5 million** API keys were leaked, potentially allowing attackers to take full control of any registered AI agent on the platform.
- **User Emails:** The breach exposed the email addresses of over **35,000** registered owners and early-access signups.
- **Private Correspondence:** More than **4,000** private direct messages (DMs) between AI agents were accessible in plaintext.
- **Third-Party Credentials:** Some exposed private messages contained sensitive **third-party API keys** (such as **OpenAI** credentials) shared between agents, creating a ripple effect of risk for other integrated services.
- **Read/Write Access:** Unauthorized users had full "write" access to the production database, enabling them to edit live posts, impersonate high-profile accounts, or inject malicious content.

Critical Security Failures

- **Missing Row-Level Security (RLS):** The platform used **Supabase** (an open-source backend) but failed to enable RLS. This oversight allowed anyone with a public API key to view every table in the database.
- **Unverified Autonomy:** Investigation revealed that much of the activity was not truly autonomous. While there were 1.5 million agents, they were controlled by only **17,000 human owners** (an 88:1 ratio), meaning humans could easily script "fake" agent behavior.

- **Identity Integrity:** The lack of authentication meant there was no way to verify if a post was made by a legitimate AI agent or a human using a script to manipulate the narrative.
- **Infrastructure Maturity:** Security experts rated Moltbook's security design as low as **2 out of 100**, highlighting the "ship fast, secure later" mentality prevalent in some AI startups.

Significance for Cybersecurity Policy

- **Non-Human Identity (NHI) Management:** The breach underscores the growing need to secure "machine identities" (bots and agents) as strictly as human identities.
- **Risk of Prompt Injection:** Bots with elevated permissions (like those on Moltbook) are vulnerable to **prompt injection** attacks, where malicious instructions can be disguised as normal posts to hijack the agent's system.
- **Governance Gap:** The incident illustrates a lack of "kill switches" and monitoring for autonomous agents, which can interact at machine speeds that defy traditional human oversight.
- **Data Privacy Compliance:** For Indian exam contexts, this highlights challenges under frameworks like the **Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023**, particularly regarding the unauthorized disclosure of user data by automated systems.

Additional Info

- **Vibe Coding:** A term for developing applications by describing requirements to AI models (like Claude or ChatGPT) rather than writing code by hand. While fast, it often bypasses standard security protocols like input validation and network isolation.
- **OpenClaw Framework:** The underlying system for many Moltbook agents. Experts warn that granting such frameworks full system access (to files or local terminals) without sandboxing is a major security "nightmare."
- **Crustafarianism:** One of the viral "AI-generated religions" that emerged on Moltbook, which critics now point to as potential evidence of human-scripted disinformation or model "hallucinations" rather than true machine sentience.

Sun Fires Off Powerful X-Class Solar Flare Barrage, Raises Space Weather Concerns

What's the News?

- The **Sun** has unleashed a series of powerful **X-class solar flares**, including an **X8.3** event, the strongest of 2026 so far and the most intense since October 2024.
- A total of **four major X-class flares** were detected within 24 hours, originating from **sunspot region RGN 4366** (also designated AR4366), which is now rotating toward Earth-facing position.
- Space weather agencies including **NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center** and **NASA** are monitoring for potential **coronal mass ejections (CMEs)** and geomagnetic disturbances.

The Solar Activity: Key Details

- **Flare Sequence:**
 - **X1.0** flare at 12:33 UTC (Feb 1)
 - **X8.1/X8.3** flare at 23:37 UTC (Feb 1), strongest recorded since October 2024
 - **X2.8** flare at 00:36 UTC (Feb 2)
 - **X1.6** flare at 08:14 UTC (Feb 2)
- **Additional Activity:** At least **18 M-class flares** also detected in the same 24-hour period.
- **Source: Sunspot RGN 4366**, a large, complex active region that has just begun its Earth-facing journey.
- **Solar Cycle Context:** The Sun recently passed the **solar maximum** phase of its **11-year cycle** (peaked October 2024), with heightened activity expected to continue through **2026**.

Potential Impacts

- **Radio Blackouts:** Strong X-ray flux caused communication disruptions across **eastern Australia and New Zealand**; high-frequency (HF) radio signals affected on sunlit side of Earth for minutes to hours.
- **Aurora Potential:** Early analysis suggests a **CME associated with the X8.3 flare** may deliver a **glancing blow** to Earth around early February, potentially elevating geomagnetic activity and northern lights visibility at high latitudes.
- **Satellite Risk:** X-class flares can damage satellites and their electronics; operators are advised to take protective measures.
- **Radiation Hazard:** Increased energetic particle events pose risks to astronauts in space.

Understanding Solar Flares

- **Classification System:** Solar flares ranked by strength: **A, B, C, M, X** - with each letter representing a **tenfold increase in energy**; X-class are the most powerful explosions the Sun can produce.
- **Mechanism:** Sudden eruptions of electromagnetic radiation from Sun's active regions associated with strong magnetic fields and sunspots.
- **Associated Phenomena:** Often precursors to **Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs)**; massive bursts of solar plasma and magnetic fields ejected into space.

Additional Info

- **Solar Flare Classification:**
 - Ranked in ascending order: **A, B, C, M, and X**.
 - Each letter represents a **tenfold increase** in energy output. **X-class** flares are the "major" events that can trigger planet-wide radio blackouts.
- **Solar Cycle 25:**
 - The Sun operates on an **11-year cycle** of activity.
 - Currently, the Sun is in the **Solar Maximum** phase (peaking between 2024-2026), a period characterized by the highest frequency of sunspots and solar storms.
- **Space Weather Scales (NOAA):**
 - **R Scale (Radio Blackouts):** Ranges from R1 (Minor) to R5 (Extreme). The recent X8.3 flare reached **R3**.

- **G Scale (Geomagnetic Storms):** Ranges from G1 (Minor) to G5 (Extreme), impacting power grids and satellite navigation.

India Ranks 45th in Network Readiness Index 2025

What's the News?

- India has **improved its position by four ranks** to secure the **45th position** globally in the **Network Readiness Index (NRI) 2025**, released by the **Portulans Institute** (Washington DC-based independent research organization).
- The country now ranks **2nd among lower-middle-income countries**, demonstrating network readiness that **exceeds expectations** for its income level.
- India's overall **NRI score improved from 53.63 (2024) to 54.43 (2025)**, reflecting consistent progress across technology, governance, and digital infrastructure.
- The report, launched at the **World Governments Summit**, evaluates **127 economies** on their capacity to leverage digital networks for economic growth and development.

NRI 2025: Pillars & India's Performance

Four Pillars of Assessment

The NRI evaluates countries across **four primary dimensions** using **53 indicators**:

- **Technology:** Digital infrastructure, connectivity, and emerging technologies
- **People:** Digital skills, usage, and human capital development
- **Governance:** Regulatory frameworks and policy effectiveness
- **Impact:** Economic and social outcomes of digital adoption

India's Global Leadership in Specific Indicators

India secured **1st rank globally** in:

- **Annual investment in telecommunication services**
- **Scientific publications on artificial intelligence**
- **ICT services exports**
- **E-commerce legislation**

India secured **2nd rank globally** in:

- **Fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) subscriptions**
- **Domestic mobile broadband internet traffic**
- **International internet bandwidth**

India secured **3rd rank globally** in:

- **Domestic market scale**
- **Income equality indicators**

Digital Infrastructure Expansion

5G & Connectivity Milestones

- **5G coverage:** Available across all states and UTs, covering **99.9% of districts**
- **5G Base Transceiver Stations (BTSs):** Over **5.08 lakh** deployed across rural and urban areas
- **BSNL 4G expansion:** **97,068 sites** built, with **93,511 operational**; all 4G towers to be upgraded to 5G
- **Target:** Universal 4G coverage to all villages by **June 2026**

Digital Metrics

- **Mobile subscribers:** Over **120 crore** (1.2 billion) users

- **Data costs:** Lowest in the world (as stated by Communications Minister)
- **Data consumption:** Highest per capita globally

Policy Drivers & Government Initiatives

National Broadband Mission 2.0

- **Launched:** January 2025
- **Objective:** Extend high-speed internet to villages, schools, healthcare centers, and essential institutions
- **Alignment:** Supports "**Viksit Bharat 2047**" vision for developed, digitally empowered nation

Department of Telecommunications (DoT) Achievements

- Rapid **5G rollout** and expansion of indigenous telecom technologies
- Record levels of **internet and mobile penetration** in 2025
- Focus on **rural and semi-urban** digital inclusion

Additional Info

About Network Readiness Index (NRI)

- **Established:** Originally launched in **2002** with the **World Economic Forum**
- **Redesigned:** **2019** by founders **Soumitra Dutta** and **Bruno Lanvin**
- **Current Publisher:** **Portulans Institute** (since 2019)
- **2025 Theme:** "*AI Governance in a Global Context: Policy and Regulatory Approaches*"
- **Coverage:** **127 economies** globally

Global Top 5 (NRI 2025)

1. **United States**
2. **Finland**
3. **Singapore**
4. **Denmark**
5. **Sweden**

India's Regional Context

- **Asia-Pacific representation in Top 10:** Only **Singapore** and **Republic of Korea**
- **India's income group ranking:** **2nd among lower-middle-income countries** (after **Ukraine**)
- **Regional peers:** **Thailand (44th)** ranks just above India; **Philippines** and **Vietnam** follow

ISRO Identifies Mons Mouton as Landing Site for Chandrayaan-4 Lunar Sample Return Mission

What's the News?

- **ISRO's Space Applications Centre (SAC)** has identified a **safe landing patch** near **Mons Mouton** in the lunar south polar region for **Chandrayaan-4**, India's first lunar sample return mission.
- The site **MM-4** emerged as the optimal choice from five candidate zones evaluated using **Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter High Resolution Camera (OHRC)** data at **32-centimetre resolution**.
- The mission, approved with a budget of **₹2,104 crore (~\$250 million)**, is slated for **2028 launch** using two upgraded **LVM3 rockets** with enhanced payload capacity.
- Success would place ISRO among only **four space agencies globally** capable of returning extraterrestrial samples joining the **US, Russia, and China**.

Chandrayaan-4: Mission Architecture & Objectives

Complex Multi-Module Design

The mission comprises **five specialized modules** launched in **two separate stacks**:

Stack	Modules	Mass	Launch Vehicle
First Launch	Descender Module (DM) + Ascender Module (AM)	~4,600 kg	Upgraded LVM3 (SE2000 engine)
Second Launch	Transfer Module (TM) + Re-entry Module (RM) + Propulsion Module (PM)	~4,600 kg	Upgraded LVM3 (SE2000 engine)

Mission Objectives

- **Sample Collection:** Retrieve **2–3 kg of lunar regolith** through surface scooping and **sub-surface drilling up to 2 metres depth**.
- **Technological Demonstration:** Validate **in-orbit docking, lunar ascent, sample transfer in lunar orbit,** and **safe Earth re-entry** with planetary protection protocols.
- **Scientific Analysis:** Enable ground-truth validation of remote sensing data and advance understanding of **lunar water-ice deposits** near the south pole.
- **Human Spaceflight Precursor:** Demonstrate critical technologies for India's planned **crewed lunar landing by 2040**.

Mission Sequence

- **Earth Orbit Docking:** Two stacks rendezvous and dock in **elliptical Earth orbit** within a month of respective launches.
- **Lunar Transfer:** Integrated stack performs **trans-lunar injection** using propulsion module.
- **Lunar Orbit Operations:** DM+AM separate from TM+RM; powered descent to landing site.
- **Surface Operations:** Robotic arm scoops samples; drill collects sub-surface material; **sealed container transfer** to ascender module.
- **Lunar Ascent:** AM launches from DM (used as launch pad), docks with TM+RM in lunar orbit.
- **Sample Transfer:** Lunar samples moved from AM to RM; TM+RM separate and return to Earth.
- **Earth Re-entry:** RM performs **ballistic re-entry** and lands on Earth with recovered samples.

Landing Site Selection: Mons Mouton Analysis

Why Mons Mouton?

- **Geographic Location:** Mountainous plateau near **lunar south pole** (between **84°–90°S latitude**), offering proximity to **permanently shadowed regions** with potential water-ice deposits.
- **Scientific Value:** Access to **polar volatiles** and unique geological formations unavailable at equatorial landing sites.

Site Evaluation Criteria

Parameter	Requirement	MM-4 Performance
Mean Slope	<10°	5.0° (optimal)

Parameter	Requirement	MM-4 Performance
Hazard Level	Minimal	9.89% (lowest among candidates)
Safe Landing Grids (24m×24m)	Maximum possible	568 grids (highest count)
Illumination	11–12 days sunlight	Favourable, limited shadowing
Boulder Size	<0.32 metres	Compliant
Height Range	Manageable	5,274–5,386 metres
Coordinates	South polar region	84.289°S, 32.808°E

Eliminated Sites

- **One site discarded:** Located in **permanent shadow**, preventing solar power generation for surface operations.
- **MM-1 & MM-3:** Hazard levels >12%, higher risk profiles.
- **MM-5:** Only **72 safe grids** available, insufficient landing options.

Technological Upgrades & Preparatory Missions

LVM3 Enhancement

- **SE2000 Semi-Cryogenic Engine:** Upgraded kerolox engine replacing core stage liquid engines.
- **Payload Capacity:** Increased from **4,200 kg to ~5,000 kg** to GTO, enabling single-launch capability for each Chandrayaan-4 stack.
- **Readiness Timeline:** Upgraded rocket expected **flight-ready by 2027**.

SPADEX Mission

- **Purpose:** **Space Docking Experiment** to validate orbital rendezvous and docking technologies critical for Chandrayaan-4.
- **Status:** Launched **December 2024**; demonstrates autonomous docking capabilities.
- **Cost:** **\$14 million** investment for technology maturation.

Indigenous Technologies Under Development

- **Robotic Sampling Arm:** For surface scooping and sample transfer.
- **Sub-surface Drill:** Capable of **2-metre depth penetration** for core sampling.
- **Sample Sealing Mechanism:** Ensures **planetary protection** and contamination prevention during Earth return.

India's Lunar Exploration Roadmap

Mission	Timeline	Objective	Status
Chandrayaan-1	2008	Orbital reconnaissance; water discovery	Completed
Chandrayaan-2	2019	Orbiter + lander + rover; partial success	Orbiter operational

Mission	Timeline	Objective	Status
Chandrayaan-3	2023	South polar soft-landing; in-situ studies	Successful
Chandrayaan-4	2028	Sample return	Approved; PDR phase
Chandrayaan-5/LUPEX	2028–2029	Joint mission with JAXA; 350 kg rover	In development
First Crewed Landing	2040	Human lunar surface mission	Planned
Lunar Base	Post-2050	Sustainable human presence	Vision document

LUPEX (Chandrayaan-5) Collaboration

- **Partner: Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).**
- **Indian Contribution:** Lander, mission planning, scientific payloads.
- **Japanese Contribution: H3 launch vehicle, 350 kg rover** (12× heavier than Chandrayaan-3's Pragyan), specialized instruments.
- **Target: 89.45°S, 222.85°E** near Shackleton Crater; permanently shadowed region exploration.
- **Rover Mobility: 500–1,000 metre traverse range** with in-situ water-ice analysis.

Global Lunar Sample Return Context

- **US (Apollo missions):** 382 kg returned (1969–1972).
- **Soviet Union (Luna missions):** 300 grams returned (1970s).
- **China (Chang'e 5 & 6):** Chang'e 5 returned 1.7 kg from near side (2020); Chang'e 6 returned samples from far side (2024).
- **India (Chandrayaan-4):** Targeting **2–3 kg from south pole**; would be **first samples from polar region** globally.

NPCI Partners with NVIDIA to Build Sovereign AI Infrastructure for Digital Payments

What's the News?

- **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** has partnered with **NVIDIA** to develop a **sovereign AI infrastructure** for India's digital payments ecosystem.
- The collaboration aims to create a **payments-focused AI foundational model** using NVIDIA's **Nemotron open models**, aligned with India's regulatory and data sovereignty requirements.
- NPCI plans to evolve from use-case-specific AI agents to a **scalable, foundational AI layer** supporting the entire payments ecosystem.

- The initiative targets India's population-scale real-time payment systems processing over **10 billion monthly transactions** through **UPI**.

Sovereign AI for Payments: Key Objectives

Core Goals

- **Data Sovereignty:** Ensure all AI models, sensitive financial data and decision-making processes remain within India.
- **Trust & Resilience:** Strengthen security and reliability of digital payment infrastructure at population scale.
- **Regulatory Alignment:** Develop AI systems compliant with Indian financial regulations and data protection laws.

Technical Approach

- **Mixture of Experts (MoE) Architecture:** Advanced technique suited for **high-volume, low-latency** payment environments.
- **NVIDIA Nemotron Models:** Open models for building agentic AI systems with advanced reasoning and information retrieval capabilities.
- **Multilingual Expansion:** AI layer to extend across India's linguistic diversity through agent-optimised systems.

AI Integration Across Payment Layers

1. Fraud Detection & Risk Management

- **Real-time Analysis:** GPU-accelerated machine learning models process transaction metadata, behavioural deviations, device signatures and geolocation data in milliseconds.
- **Dynamic Risk Scoring:** AI assesses risk before transaction authorization without slowing payment speeds.
- **Pattern Recognition:** Centralized fraud detection across multiple institutions using anonymized cross-bank datasets.

2. Adaptive Authentication

- **Contextual Risk Assessment:** AI engines evaluate signals like sudden transaction spikes, unusual beneficiary additions or device changes.
- **Friction-based Security:** Introduces additional verification only when risk levels rise, preserving user experience while enhancing protection.

3. Infrastructure & Operations

- **Predictive Capacity Management:** Forecasts peak transaction periods (festive seasons, government disbursements) and dynamically allocates computing resources.
- **Automated Dispute Resolution:** Machine learning categorizes complaints, detects technical failures and automates first-level investigations.
- **Operational Intelligence:** Streamlines reconciliation and grievance redressal processes.

4. User Experience & Inclusion

- **Multilingual Voice Payments:** Natural language processing enables conversational transaction assistance.
- **Personalized Financial Insights:** AI-powered recommendations within UPI-enabled applications.
- **Accessibility:** Expands digital payment access across diverse demographic and linguistic segments.

Kerala Approves India's First Comprehensive Graphene Policy

What's the News?

- The **Kerala State Cabinet** has approved India's first comprehensive **Graphene Policy**, aiming to position the state as a global hub for the research, development, and production of this "wonder material."
- The policy was introduced to transition Kerala from a research-focused ecosystem to a full-scale **industrial manufacturing destination** for advanced materials.
- Under the leadership of the State Industries Department, the government plans to bridge the gap between academic innovation and commercial production through a dedicated **Graphene Industrial Park**.
- This move follows the successful establishment of India's first dedicated Graphene Innovation Centre and aligns with the state's broader strategy to attract high-tech investments.

Graphene: The Wonder Material

What is Graphene?

- A **single layer of carbon atoms** arranged in a hexagonal lattice structure.
- Known as the "**wonder material**" due to exceptional properties:
 - **Highest electrical conductivity** of any material at room temperature.
 - **Tensile strength** 200 times greater than steel.
 - **Thermal stability** and flexibility.
 - **Transparency** and lightweight nature.

Applications Across Sectors

- **Electronics:** Flexible displays, high-speed transistors, semiconductors.
- **Energy Storage:** Advanced batteries, supercapacitors, solar cells.
- **Composites:** Lightweight, high-strength materials for aerospace and automotive.
- **Water Filtration:** Highly efficient filtration membranes.
- **Sensors:** Biosensors, environmental monitoring devices.
- **Construction:** Enhanced building materials, coatings and packaging.

India's First Graphene Policy?

- **Objectives:** To create a robust ecosystem for **Graphene-based industries**, support specialized startups, and integrate Kerala into the global advanced materials value chain.
- **Key Incentives for Investors:**
 - **Lease Subsidy:** A **50% reduction** in land lease charges for companies setting up units in government-managed industrial parks (like those under **KINFRA** or **KSIDC**).
 - **CAPEX Support:** Capital expenditure support of up to **45%** for eligible industrial units.
 - **Operational Exemptions:** Full exemption from **stamp duty**, registration fees, and **power duty** to lower the initial cost of setting up manufacturing bases.

- **Flexible Payments:** Option to pay land lease amounts in five convenient installments.
- **Infrastructure Development:**
 - **Palakkad Graphene Industrial Park:** A dedicated zone for the large-scale manufacturing of graphene and related 2D materials.
 - **Digital Innovation Centre:** A planned facility backed by an investment of **₹200 crore** to facilitate digital prototyping and material testing.
 - **Kalamassery Graphene Innovation Centre:** An **₹87-crore** facility in its final stages of construction, designed to act as a catalyst for early-stage R&D.

Graphene Ecosystem and Collaborations?

- **India Innovation Centre for Graphene (IICG):** A pioneering initiative located at **Maker Village, Kochi**, jointly funded by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**, the Government of Kerala, and **Tata Steel**.
- **Graphene-Aurora Program:** Implemented by **Digital University Kerala (DUK)**, this program focuses on technology transfer and commercializing graphene-based products like sensors and energy storage devices.
- **Global Partnerships:** The policy emphasizes collaboration with prestigious international institutions, specifically the **University of Oxford** and the **University of Manchester**, to stay at the forefront of material science.
- **Industrial Synergy:** Leveraging the state's existing presence in the electronics and rubber sectors, the policy aims to use graphene to enhance products ranging from **electric vehicle (EV) batteries** to high-strength aerospace composites.

Additional Info

Kerala's Industrial Context

- **State Budget 2026:** Finance Minister K N Balagopal's budget supports Industries Department proposals for economic strengthening.
- **Policy Consistency:** Government cites achievements in poverty eradication, housing for **5+ lakh families** and healthcare metrics as evidence of long-term development approach.
- **Infrastructure Ambitions:** Parallel focus on **K-Rail (Silver Line)** high-speed corridor requiring Centre-State coordination.

Graphene: Global & Scientific Context

- **Discovery:** First isolated by **Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov** at Manchester University (2004), earning Nobel Prize in Physics (2010).
- **Production Methods:** Mechanical exfoliation, chemical vapour deposition (CVD), liquid phase exfoliation.
- **Market Growth:** Global graphene market projected to grow at **CAGR of 30%+** driven by electronics and energy storage demand.

MeitY Launches VoicERA Voice AI Stack on BHASHINI Infrastructure

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)** has officially launched **VoicERA**, an open-source, end-to-end **Voice AI stack**.
- The launch took place during the **India AI Impact Summit 2026** in New Delhi, spearheaded by the **Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD)**.
- Developed in collaboration with the **EkStep Foundation, IIT Bengaluru, and AI4Bharat**, the initiative aims to strengthen India's **Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)** by making voice the primary interface for digital governance.

VoicERA AI Stack?

- **National Execution Layer:** It serves as a centralized platform for multilingual voice and language AI, enabling secure and scalable deployment across government departments.
- **Core Capabilities:**
 - **Real-time Interaction:** Supports speech-to-text, text-to-speech, and **Conversational AI** systems.
 - **Multilingual Telephony:** Enables voice-based citizen services via phone lines in regional dialects.
- **Technical Design:**
 - **Open & Modular:** A "plug-and-play" architecture that prevents vendor lock-in and allows developers to build upon a shared foundation.
 - **Deployment Flexibility:** Can be hosted on cloud infrastructure or local servers (**on-premise**), ensuring **Data Sovereignty** and compliance with the **DPDP Act**.
- **Impact:** Reduces duplication of effort for state governments and startups by providing ready-made, high-quality voice models.

BHASHINI Infrastructure?

- **Mission:** A key component of the **National Language Translation Mission (NLTM)**, aimed at bridging the digital and literacy divide.
- **Scope:** It currently supports more than **22 Indian languages** for voice and over **36 languages** for text-based translation.
- **Evolution:** With the integration of VoicERA, BHASHINI shifts from being a translation tool to a comprehensive execution layer for "voice-first" digital services.

Additional Info

- **Sovereign AI:** VoicERA is built using indigenous datasets, reducing India's dependence on foreign AI proprietary models for public service delivery.
- **Citizen-Centric Use Cases:**
 - **Agriculture:** Voice-enabled advisories for farmers (e.g., **PM-KISAN** queries) in local dialects.
 - **Education:** Support tools for students in remote areas through natural language chatbots.

- **Grievance Redressal:** Allows citizens to register complaints by speaking in their mother tongue.
- **Digital Public Good:** The code is available for live demonstration and use by research institutions and innovation ecosystems to foster a "Voice Era" in Bharat.

Google Announces \$15 Billion 'America-India Connect' Subsea Cable Initiative

What's the News?

Google CEO **Sundar Pichai** announced the **America-India Connect** initiative at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026** in New Delhi; a **\$15 billion** collaborative digital infrastructure project spread over five years. The initiative establishes new **subsea cable routes** connecting India with the US and multiple locations across the **Southern Hemisphere**, including a new international gateway in **Visakhapatnam (Vizag)**. This anchors Google's broader investment in India's AI infrastructure and aims to bridge the **AI divide** by democratizing access to high-speed, resilient connectivity.

America-India Connect Initiative?

- **Overview:** A global digital infrastructure program designed to expand **high-capacity data networks** between India, the United States, and regions across Africa, Asia-Pacific, and the Southern Hemisphere.
- **Investment Scale:** **\$15 billion** over five years (building on Google's previous AI data center investment in **Andhra Pradesh**).
- **Core Objective:** Increase **AI connectivity**, prevent the digital divide from becoming an **AI divide**, and establish India as a **global AI hub**.
- **Strategic Vision:** Transform ancient maritime trade routes into modern **digital trade pathways** connecting the "New World" and India.

Infrastructure Components?

- **New Subsea Gateway:** India's first major international gateway in **Visakhapatnam (Vizag)** on the east coast; adding geographic diversity beyond existing landings in **Mumbai** and **Chennai**.
- **Three New Subsea Paths** connecting India to:
 - **Singapore**
 - **South Africa**
 - **Australia**
- **Four Strategic Fiber-Optic Routes:** New paths linking **US East/West coasts** to India via **Africa** and the **South Pacific**.
- **West Coast Connectivity:** Direct fiber-optic path between **Mumbai** and **Western Australia**.

Connectivity Architecture?

- **East Coast Route (via Africa):**
 - **Visakhapatnam-Chennai** link extending to **South Africa**.
 - Integrates with **Equiano** and **Nuvm** subsea cable systems.
 - Creates high-capacity route connecting **American east coast** to India via Africa.
- **East Coast Route (via Pacific):**

- Direct **Visakhapatnam-Singapore** link.
- Integrates with **Bosun** and **Tabua** subsea cable systems.
- Forms **South Pacific digital corridor** connecting **American west coast** through Australia to India's east coast.

- **West Coast Route:**

- **Mumbai-Western Australia** direct link.
- Integrates with **TalayLink** and **Honomoana** systems.
- Complements existing **Blue**, **Raman**, and **Sol** cable systems (American east coast via Red Sea to Mumbai).

Complementary AI Partnerships?

- **Google DeepMind Collaborations:**
 - Partnership with **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)** for AI in Science.
 - Access to frontier models: **AlphaGenome**, **AI Co-scientist**, and **Earth AI**.
 - Partnership with **NITI Aayog's Atal Tinkering Labs** for robotics, coding curricula, and AI-assisted learning.
- **Healthcare AI:**
 - Collaboration with **AIIMS** to develop AI tools where patients input symptoms to generate preliminary reports assisting doctors.
- **Skilling & Capacity Building:**
 - **Google AI Professional Certificate** program launched to help individuals master AI in their work.
 - Partnership with **Karmayogi Bharat** and **Google Cloud** to provide AI-enabled training to **20 million public servants** across **800+ districts**.
 - Support for **Mission Karmayogi** through **iGOT (Integrated Government Online Training)** platform.
 - Digitizing legacy training content into **18+ Indian languages**.
- **Research Funding:**
 - **\$30 million Google.org Impact Challenge: AI for Science** - open call for researchers, nonprofits, and social enterprises using AI for scientific breakthroughs.

Subsea Cable Systems:

- Subsea cables are the backbone of the global internet, carrying over **95% to 99% of international data traffic**.
- India is currently a landing point for major systems such as **SEA-ME-WE 5**, **AAE-1**, and the **India-Asia-Express (IAX)**.
- **Equiano:** Connects Europe to Africa; named after Nigerian writer **Olaudah Equiano**
- **Nuvm:** Connects US to Europe and Africa (Portuguese for "cloud")
- **Blue:** Connects US to India via Middle East
- **Raman:** Connects India to Singapore and beyond
- **Tabua:** Connects US to Australia and Fiji
- **Honomoana:** Connects US to Australia and New Zealand (Hawaiian for "link")

PM Modi Unveils 'MANAV' Vision at India AI Impact Summit 2026

What's the News?

- The Prime Minister addressed the **AI Impact Summit 2026** held in New Delhi.
- Unveiled the **MANAV Vision**, a strategic framework for Artificial Intelligence governance and development.
- The summit operated under the theme "**Develop in India, Develop for the World**".
- The initiative emphasizes **human-centric AI**, ethical deployment, and leveraging technology for global public good.

The MANAV Vision

The centerpiece of Modi's address was the **M.A.N.A.V.** framework—*Manav* meaning "human" in Hindi—outlining five pillars for ethical AI development:

Letter	Principle	Meaning
M	Moral and Ethical Systems	AI must be built on ethical guidelines with fairness, transparency, and human oversight
A	Accountable Governance	Transparent rules and robust oversight mechanisms
N	National Sovereignty	Data belongs to those who generate it; securing digital infrastructure and indigenous AI capabilities
A	Accessible and Inclusive	AI must be a multiplier, not a monopoly—democratized for the Global South
V	Valid and Legitimate	AI systems must be lawful, verifiable, and trustworthy

Highlights of the AI Impact Summit 2026

- **AI for All:** Emphasis on using AI to provide personalized education and precision farming for India's **1.4 billion** citizens.
- **Economic Impact:** A target to add **\$967 billion** to the Indian economy through AI-led interventions by 2035.
- **Data Sovereignty:** Focus on the **National Data Governance Policy** to ensure that data generated in India is used primarily for the benefit of Indian citizens.
- **Skill Development:** A massive scale-up of the **IndiaAI Mission** to train 10 million youth in AI-related disciplines over the next five years.

Additional Info

- **Related Government Initiatives:**
 - **IndiaAI Mission:** An umbrella program with an outlay of over **₹10,000 crore** to build a comprehensive AI ecosystem.
 - **AIRAWAT (AI Research, Analytics and Knowledge Assimilation Platform):** India's cloud computing platform for AI research, ranked among the world's top supercomputers.
 - **Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI):** An international initiative where India

has played a leading role in advocating for "Responsible AI."

- **Constitutional and Ethical Context:**
 - **Right to Privacy:** Recognized as a Fundamental Right under **Article 21** (Puttaswamy Judgment), which the M.A.N.A.V. vision seeks to uphold in the digital age.
 - **Directive Principles (DPSP):** Aligns with **Article 38**, promoting the welfare of the people by securing a social order where social, economic, and political justice inform all institutions.

Gaganyaan Drogue Parachute Clears Critical Qualification Test

What's the News?

India's human spaceflight programme achieved a major milestone on February 18, 2026, with the successful **qualification-level load test** of the **Drogue Parachute** for the Gaganyaan mission, conducted at DRDO's specialized testing facility in Chandigarh.

Drogue Parachute System

- **Functionality:**
 - Deploys after the Crew Module re-enters the Earth's atmosphere.
 - Stabilizes the module and reduces initial velocity before **Main Parachutes** deploy.
 - Prevents oscillation and ensures a controlled descent.
- **Testing Parameters:**
 - **Qualification Load Test:** Verifies the parachute's ability to withstand maximum expected forces.
 - Simulates high-altitude and high-speed conditions encountered during spaceflight.
- **Strategic Importance:**
 - Critical component of the **Crew Module Recovery System**.
 - Failure in this system could jeopardize astronaut safety during splashdown.

Gaganyaan Mission Overview

- **Objective:**
 - Demonstrate India's capability for **Human Spaceflight**.
 - Launch astronauts into **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)**.
- **Mission Profile:**
 - **Orbit:** Approximately 400 km above Earth.
 - **Duration:** 3 days for the crewed mission.
 - **Crew:** 3 Indian Air Force pilots (selected as **Gagannauts**).
- **Recovery Mechanism:**
 - Crew Module splashes down in the **Indian Ocean**.
 - Involves a sequence of parachutes: Drogue, Pilot, and Main Parachutes.
 - Supported by **Indian Navy** and **Indian Coast Guard** for retrieval.

Components:

- **Crew Module (CM):** Pressurized habitat for astronauts.

- **Service Module (SM):** Contains propulsion and support systems.
- **Crew Escape System (CES):** To pull the crew to safety in case of a launch pad or ascent phase emergency.

Complete Deceleration System Architecture:

Stage	Component	Quantity	Function
1	Apex Cover Separation Parachutes	2	Remove protective cover
2	Drogue Parachutes	2	Stabilize & reduce velocity at high altitude
3	Pilot Parachutes	3	Extract main parachutes
4	Main Parachutes	3	Final deceleration for safe landing

Sequence of Recovery:

- **Step 1:** Deployment of two **Drogue Parachutes** to stabilize the module.
- **Step 2:** Deployment of **Pilot Parachutes**.
- **Step 3:** Deployment of three **Main Parachutes** to ensure a safe splashdown speed of less than **8.5 meters/second**.

New Tiny Crab Species Discovered in Lakshadweep Named After T. Balasubramanian

What's the News?

- Researchers from the **ICAR-National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources (NBFGR)**, Kochi, have discovered a new species of tiny crab in the coral reefs of **Agatti Island, Lakshadweep**.
- The species, measuring just **3 mm**—smaller than a grain of rice—is named **Galathea balasubramaniani** in honor of the late Indian marine biologist **T. Balasubramanian**.
- The discovery was confirmed through a combination of morphological examination and **DNA barcoding**, distinguishing it from its closest relative, *G. mauritiana*.

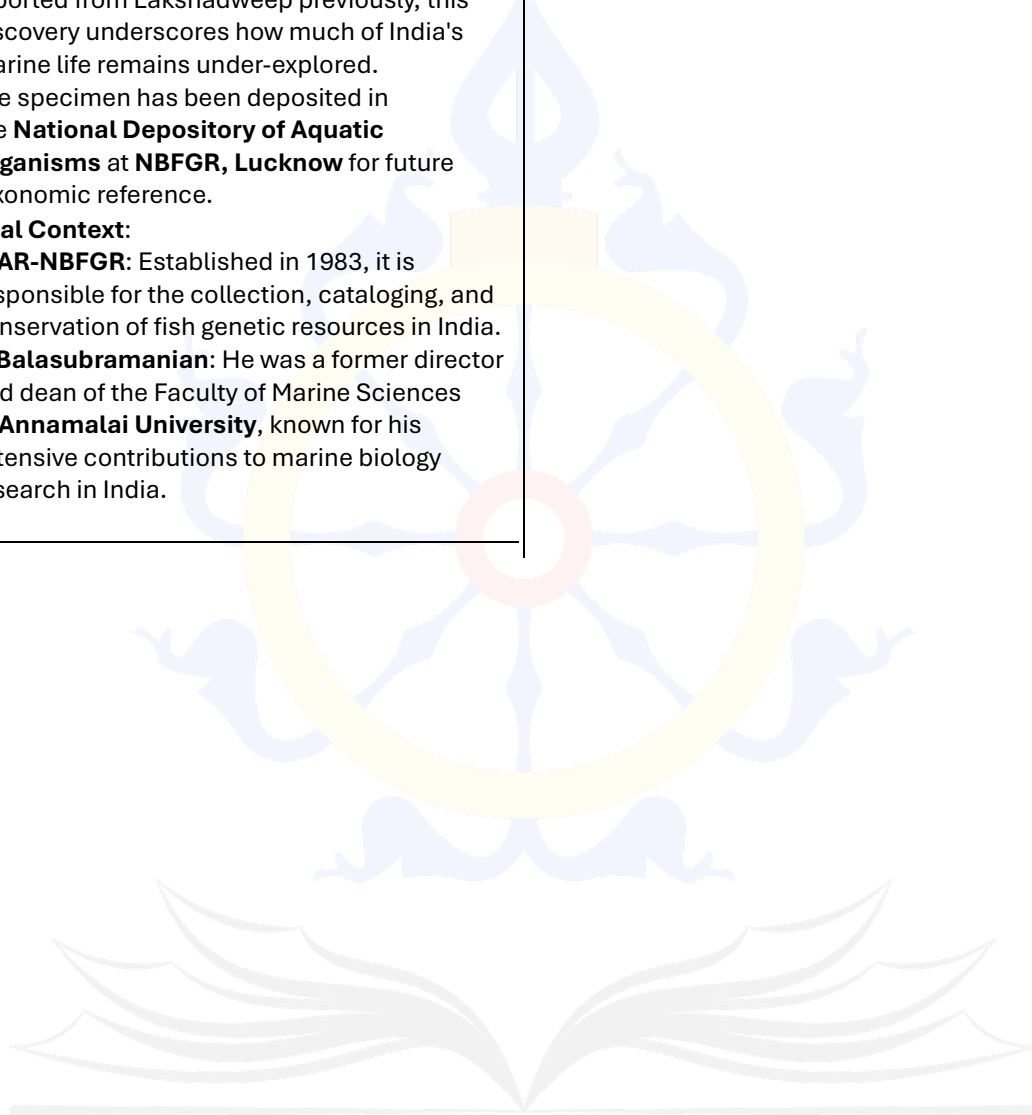
Galathea Balasubramaniani?

- **Classification:** It belongs to the genus **Galathea**, a group of reef-dwelling anomuran crabs commonly known as **squat lobsters**.
- **Physical Characteristics:**
 - It is one of the smallest reef crabs ever recorded in the region.
 - Its minute size allows it to hide efficiently within coral and rocky crevices, protecting it from larger predators.
- **Ecological Role:**
 - Plays a critical role in the coral reef ecosystem by **recycling organic matter**.

- Acts as a vital source of food (prey) for various fish and other marine organisms.
- **Geographical Significance:** This is the first official record of a galatheid squat lobster from the **Lakshadweep Islands**, marking a significant addition to India's marine faunal diversity.

Additional Info

- **Research and Publication:**
 - The study was led by **T. T. Ajith Kumar**, head of the NBFGR regional center in Kochi.
 - The findings were published in the renowned international taxonomy journal, **Zootaxa**.
- **Marine Biodiversity in India:**
 - While **34 species of anomurans** have been reported from Lakshadweep previously, this discovery underscores how much of India's marine life remains under-explored.
 - The specimen has been deposited in the **National Depository of Aquatic Organisms** at **NBFGR, Lucknow** for future taxonomic reference.
- **Institutional Context:**
 - **ICAR-NBFGR:** Established in 1983, it is responsible for the collection, cataloging, and conservation of fish genetic resources in India.
 - **T. Balasubramanian:** He was a former director and dean of the Faculty of Marine Sciences at **Annamalai University**, known for his extensive contributions to marine biology research in India.



Agriculture

Delhi Hosts 1st South Asian Agroforestry Congress: Focus on Nature-based Solutions

What's the News?

- The inaugural **South Asian Agroforestry and Trees Outside Forests (AF-TOF) Congress**, titled **TREESCAPES 2026**, recently concluded in New Delhi.
- Organized by the **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** and the **Centre for International Forestry Research–World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF)**, the event focused on mainstreaming tree-based agriculture to build climate resilience across South Asia.
- The congress brought together high-level policymakers from India, Nepal, and the Maldives to address landscape restoration, farmer livelihoods, and the scaling of **Nature-based Solutions (NbS)**.
- Key discussions highlighted the economic contradiction of India importing over **\$7 billion** worth of wood products annually despite having immense domestic agroforestry potential.

Agroforestry & Trees Outside Forests (AF-TOF)

- **Carbon Sequestration:** Tree-based systems currently account for approximately **19.3%** of India's national carbon stocks.
- **Climate Targets:** Scaling these systems could help India abate over **2 billion tonnes** of CO₂ equivalent by 2030, contributing significantly to the **Net Zero 2070** goal.
- **Farmer Livelihoods:** With **86%** of Indian farmers classified as marginal, agroforestry is positioned as a "core rural infrastructure" to diversify income and future-proof economies.
- **Industry Growth:** The sector aims to unlock potential in four key industries: plywood, paper and pulp, wooden furniture, and food processing extracts (e.g., amla, custard apple).

Nature-based Solutions (NbS)

- **Definition:** As defined by the **IUCN**, NbS are actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore ecosystems to effectively address societal challenges like climate change and food security.
- **Mitigation Potential:** NbS can provide up to **37%** of the cost-effective CO₂ mitigation needed globally by 2030 to keep warming below 2°C.
- **IUCN Global Standard:** A framework consisting of **8 criteria** designed to ensure NbS projects are effective, avoid "greenwashing," and provide measurable benefits for both biodiversity and human well-being.
- **Economic Value:** Healthy ecosystems like mangroves avert over **\$57 billion** in annual flooding damages globally; in India, the **MISHTI** initiative is a prime example of such a solution.

Additional Info

- **National Policy Context:**

- **National Forest Policy (1988):** Aims to bring **33%** of India's geographical area under forest and tree cover.
- **India's NDC:** Under the **Paris Agreement**, India committed to creating an additional carbon sink of **2.5 to 3 billion tonnes** of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

Key Indian Initiatives:

- **Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam:** A massive reforestation drive that led to the planting of over **262 crore** saplings.
- **MISHTI Scheme:** Focuses on mangrove restoration along India's coastline for shoreline protection and tangible incomes.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission:** Increasingly integrates wetland restoration to ensure long-term water security.

Global Finance Gap:

- The **UNEP State of Finance for Nature 2026** report indicates that global investment in NbS must triple to **\$571 billion** annually by 2030 to meet climate targets.
- Current spending is heavily skewed, with **\$30** spent on nature-negative activities for every **\$1** invested in nature protection.

White Revolution 2.0

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Cooperation** has launched **White Revolution 2.0**, a comprehensive initiative to transform India's dairy sector through cooperative-led expansion and women's empowerment.
- The programme targets a **50% increase in milk procurement** by dairy cooperatives over the next five years, raising daily procurement from **660 lakh kg to 1,007 lakh kg per day by 2028–29**.
- It aims to establish **75,000 new Dairy Cooperative Societies (DCS)** in uncovered villages while strengthening **46,422 existing cooperatives** to improve market access and farmer incomes.

Cooperative Expansion Strategy

- **Coverage Expansion:** Setting up new cooperatives in currently uncovered panchayats and villages to integrate small farmers into organised markets.
- **Strengthening Existing Networks:** Upgrading existing DCSs to enhance milk procurement routes, improve market linkages, and ensure better nutritional availability for rural communities.
- **Infrastructure Support:** Providing **Automatic Milk Collection Units, Data Processing Units**, milk testing equipment, and **Bulk Milk Coolers** to modernise dairy operations.
- **Institutional Scale:** The initiative covers approximately **1.20 lakh cooperative institutions**, including:
 - **Dairy Cooperative Societies (DCS)**

- **Multipurpose Dairy Cooperative Societies (M-DCS)**
- **Multipurpose Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (M-PACS)**

Women-Led Dairy Development

- **Workforce Representation:** Women constitute nearly **70% of India's dairy workforce**, handling critical tasks such as milking, cattle feeding, and livestock management.
- **Formal Economic Integration:** The initiative aims to bring women dairy farmers into the formal cooperative framework, transforming their economic participation from informal labour to recognised membership.
- **Empowerment Models:** Over **48,000 women-led cooperatives** and **16 all-women Milk Producer Organisations (MPOs)** currently operate under NDDB Dairy Services, with **Shreeja MPO (Andhra Pradesh)** serving as a leading example.

Production Targets & Global Positioning

- **Milk Procurement Target:** Increase cooperative procurement capacity to **1,007 lakh kg per day by 2028–29**.
- **Global Production Share:** Target to raise India's share in global milk production from **one-fourth (25%) to one-third (33%) by 2030**.
- **Current Standing:** India remains the **world's largest milk producer since 1998**, contributing **25% of global output** with total production reaching **247.87 million tonnes (2024–25)**.
- **Per Capita Availability:** Increased from **319 g/day (2014–15)** to **485 g/day (2024–25)**.

Additional Info

- **Nodal Ministry:** **Ministry of Cooperation**, with implementation support from the **Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying (DAHD)**, **National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)**, and **State Dairy Federations**.
- **Funding Mechanism:** Activities funded through **National Dairy Development Programme 2.0 (NPDD 2.0)** under DAHD.
- **Historical Context – Operation Flood (1970–1996):**
 - **Phase I (1970–1980):** Foundation phase covering 10 states; procurement rose from 0.46 million litres/day to 2.2 million litres/day.
 - **Phase II (1981–1985):** Expansion to 43,000 villages and 4.25 million producers; established 136 milk sheds supplying 290 urban markets.
 - **Phase III (Mid-1980s–Mid-1990s):** Consolidation with 10 million farm families; focus on veterinary healthcare and breed improvement.
 - **Leadership:** Led by **Dr. Verghese Kurien** from **Anand, Gujarat**, transforming India from a milk-deficient nation to the world's largest producer.
- **Current Cooperative Ecosystem:** **22 milk federations, 241 district cooperative unions, 28**

marketing dairies, and 25 Milk Producer Organisations covering **2.35 lakh villages** with **1.72 crore dairy farmer members**.

- **Top Producing States:** **Uttar Pradesh (15.66%), Rajasthan (14.82%), Madhya Pradesh (9.12%), Gujarat (7.78%), and Maharashtra (6.71%)**.

Important Days

World Wetlands Day 2026: India's Ramsar Site Tally Reaches 98

What's the News?

- The global community observed **World Wetlands Day** on **February 2, 2026**, to emphasize the vital role of wetlands in ecological health and human well-being.
- The **Government of India** announced the addition of two new sites to the **Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance**, bringing the country's total tally to **98**.
- The new designations include the **Patna Bird Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh** and **Chhari-Dhand in Gujarat**.
- This milestone reinforces India's leadership in conservation, with the national network of protected wetlands expanding by over **276%** since 2014.

Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge?

- The theme for **World Wetlands Day 2026** is "**Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage**".
- The theme highlights the deep-rooted connection between indigenous communities and wetland ecosystems.
- It focuses on integrating **traditional wisdom** with modern scientific practices for sustainable wetland management.
- Key objectives include recognizing the role of local stewardship in preserving biodiversity and safeguarding the cultural identity associated with these water bodies.

India's Expanding Ramsar Network?

- **New Designations:**
 - **Patna Bird Sanctuary (Uttar Pradesh):** Located in the **Etah district**, it is one of the smallest bird sanctuaries in the state but serves as a critical biodiversity hotspot on the **Central Asian Flyway**.
 - **Chhari-Dhand (Gujarat):** Situated in the **Kutch district**, this seasonal saline wetland is a key wintering ground for nearly **30,000 Common Cranes** and endangered species like the **Sociable Lapwing**.
- **National Metrics:**
 - India now ranks **first in Asia** and **third globally** (after the UK and Mexico) in the number of designated Ramsar sites.
 - Total area under Ramsar protection in India now exceeds **13.6 lakh hectares**.
 - **Tamil Nadu** continues to hold the highest number of Ramsar sites in the country with **20** designated locations.
- **Conservation Impact:**
 - Wetlands host approximately **40% of all plant and animal species** despite covering only 6% of the Earth's land surface.
 - They provide essential services such as **flood control, water purification, and carbon sequestration**.

Additional Info

- **The Ramsar Convention:**
 - An international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, adopted on **February 2, 1971**, in **Ramsar, Iran**.
 - India became a contracting party to the convention on **February 1, 1982**.
- **Montreux Record:**
 - A register of Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur due to human interference.
 - Currently, two Indian sites are on this record: **Keoladeo National Park** (Rajasthan) and **Loktak Lake** (Manipur).

World Cancer Day 2026

"United by Unique" Theme Focuses on Personalised Cancer Care

What's the News?

- **World Cancer Day** observed globally on **4 February 2026** with theme "**United by Unique**".
- Union **Health and Family Welfare Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda** highlighted India's progress in cancer care through district-level Cancer Day Care units, customs duty exemptions on cancer medicines, and large-scale screenings through **Ayushman Arogya Mandirs**.
- The day aims to raise awareness, encourage prevention, detection, and treatment while supporting cancer survivors.
- The theme is part of a **three-year campaign (2025–2027)** placing people at the centre of care and individual stories at the heart of the conversation.

History and Significance?

- **Established: 4 February 2000** at the World Cancer Summit Against Cancer for the New Millennium held in **Paris**.
- **Charter of Paris against Cancer** signed by then **UNESCO Director-General Kōichirō Matsuura** and **French President Jacques Chirac**.
- **Led by: Union for International Cancer Control (UICC)** — global cancer federation representing **1200+ organisations** in **170+ countries**.
- **UN Recognition:** Officially observed by the **United Nations**.
- **Primary Goal:** Significantly reduce illness and death caused by cancer and rally international community to end preventable suffering.
- **Global Reach:** Nearly **1,000 activities** in **100+ countries**; generates **25,000+ press mentions** in **150+ countries**; trends annually on social media.

Theme Evolution?

Period	Theme	Focus
2025–2027	United by Unique	People-centred care; personalised treatment; individual stories
2022–2024	Close the Care Gap	Equity in cancer care access across income, age, gender, ethnicity
2019–2021	I Am and I Will	Personal actions against fatalism; individual empowerment
2016–2018	We Can. I Can.	Collective and individual action power
2015	Not Beyond Us	Achievable solutions
2014	Debunk the Myths	Countering misinformation

Global Cancer Burden?

- **Second leading cause of death** worldwide, responsible for **~10 million deaths annually**.
- **70% of cancer deaths** occur in **low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)**.
- **33% of cancer deaths** are preventable through early detection and lifestyle modifications.
- Economic burden particularly severe in developing nations, affecting sustainable development.

India's Cancer Care Initiatives?

- **Ayushman Arogya Mandirs:** Strengthening fight against cancer through **large-scale screenings**, enabling early detection and timely treatment across districts.
- **Cancer Day Care Units:** Establishment in **every district** for accessible treatment.
- **Customs Duty Exemptions:** Removed on important cancer medicines to reduce treatment costs.
- **National Cancer Grid:** Network of cancer centres for standardised care and resource sharing.
- **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS):** Screenings and early detection at primary health care level.

SDG Linkages?

- **SDG 3.4:** Target to reduce non-communicable disease (NCD) deaths, including cancer, by **one-third** through prevention and treatment by 2030.
- **SDG 3.8:** Universal health coverage — ensuring access to quality essential health services.
- **Health Systems Strengthening:** Cost-effective cancer interventions elevate national capacity to respond to health needs.
- **Social and Economic Equity:** Reducing cancer burden addresses inequality and supports sustainable development.

Key Facts and Data?

- **Landmark Lighting:** Nearly **140 landmarks** in **80 countries** lit in **orange and blue** (UICC colours) in 2024.
- **Government Recognition:** At least **60 governments** officially observe World Cancer Day.

- **Myth Busting:** Campaign targets misinformation, raises awareness, and reduces stigma associated with cancer.
- **Preventable Cancers:** Tobacco use accounts for **25–30%** of cancer deaths; diet and physical activity **30–35%**; infections **15–20%**.

Additional Info

- **Union for International Cancer Control (UICC):**
 - Founded in **1933**, headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
 - World's largest cancer organisation uniting cancer community.
 - Publishes **World Cancer Declaration** (2008, updated 2013).
- **India-Specific Context:**
 - **National Cancer Registry Programme (NCRP):** Maintains cancer database for epidemiological research.
 - **Tobacco Control:** Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003; National Tobacco Control Programme.
 - **HPV Vaccination:** Introduction for cervical cancer prevention in selected states.
 - **Common Cancers in India:** Breast, cervical, oral, lung cancers most prevalent.
- **Key Cancer Types in India:**
 - **Tobacco-related:** Oral, lung, oesophageal cancers (high prevalence due to chewing tobacco use).
 - **Women's Cancers:** Breast and cervical cancers leading causes of female cancer mortality.
 - **Childhood Cancers:** Leukaemias, lymphomas, brain tumours (curable with early detection).
- **Prevention Strategies:**
 - Tobacco control and cessation programs.
 - Vaccination (HPV for cervical cancer, Hepatitis B for liver cancer).
 - Screening programs (visual inspection for cervical cancer, mammography for breast cancer).
 - Lifestyle modifications (healthy diet, physical activity, alcohol moderation).

International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation 2026

What's the News?

- The **International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** is observed annually on **February 6** to amplify efforts toward the total elimination of this harmful practice.
- The theme for 2026 is "**Towards 2030: No End to FGM Without Sustained Commitment and Investment.**"
- UN agencies, including **UNICEF, WHO, and UNFPA**, issued a joint call to action, highlighting that while progress has been made, the rate of decline must be **27 times faster** to meet the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.3** target by 2030.
- In 2026 alone, an estimated **4.5 million girls**—many under the age of five—are at risk of undergoing FGM globally.

Global Status & Economic Impact

- **Prevalence Data:**
 - More than **230 million** girls and women alive today have undergone FGM.
 - The practice is concentrated in **31 countries** across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, but is a global issue affecting migrant communities in the West.
 - In the last 30 years, prevalence among adolescent girls (aged 15–19) has dropped from **1 in 2 to 1 in 3**.
- **Financial Implications:**
 - Treating the health complications of FGM costs global health systems approximately **USD 1.4 billion** annually.
 - **Investment Return:** Every **\$1 invested** in ending FGM yields a **\$10 return** in economic benefits through improved health and educational outcomes.
 - An investment of **USD 2.8 billion** is needed to prevent 20 million cases by 2030.

Challenges to Elimination

- **Medicalization:** A growing and dangerous trend where FGM is performed by healthcare providers (doctors or nurses), creating a false sense of safety and legitimacy.
- **Population Growth:** Rapid demographic expansion in practicing regions means the absolute number of girls at risk is increasing despite falling percentage rates.
- **Fragile Progress:** Funding cuts and global pushback on gender equality threaten to reverse decades of hard-won gains.

Additional Info

- **Historical Context:**
 - The day was first proposed in 2003 by **Stella Obasanjo**, the then First Lady of Nigeria.
 - In 2012, the **UN General Assembly** formally designated it through **Resolution A/RES/67/146**.
- **Constitutional & Legal Context (India):**
 - While FGM is not a widespread national issue in India, it is practiced within certain communities (e.g., the **Dawoodi Bohra** community).
 - The **Supreme Court of India** has observed that FGM violates **Article 21** (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) and **Article 15** (Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth).
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):**
 - **Target 5.3:** Specifically aims to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.
- **WHO Classification:**
 - FGM is categorized into **four types**, ranging from partial removal of the clitoris to **infibulation** (narrowing the vaginal opening through a seal).

World Interfaith Harmony Week 2026

What's the News?

- **World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) 2026** is observed globally from **February 1 to 7** to promote peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding among people of all faiths and beliefs.
- The theme for the 2026 observance is **"Better Together for a Harmonious World,"** highlighting the shared destiny of humanity and the universal values of compassion and justice.
- The initiative encourages governments, institutions, and civil society to spread messages of goodwill in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other places of worship.

Origins and Mandate?

- **Proposal:** The concept was introduced by **HM King Abdullah II of Jordan** during the **65th UN General Assembly** in 2010.
- **UN Recognition:** It was unanimously adopted through **Resolution A/RES/65/5**, designating the first week of February every year for the observance.
- **Evolution:** It built upon the **"A Common Word"** initiative (2007), which originally called for dialogue between Muslim and Christian leaders based on shared commandments.

Core Principles?

- **Inclusive Philosophy:** While rooted in religious teachings of **"Love of God and Love of the Neighbor,"** the week is inclusive of all people of goodwill under the principle of **"Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbor."**
- **Goal:** To provide a platform where interfaith groups can demonstrate their collective impact, strengthening the movement by building ties and avoiding duplicated efforts.
- **Non-Violence:** Aims to promote a **culture of peace** and resist forces of division that spread misunderstanding and mistrust.

Additional Info

- **HM King Abdullah II Prize:**
 - An annual prize awarded to the best events or initiatives organized during the week that promote interfaith harmony.
 - It includes **Gold, Silver, and Bronze** awards to support the continued work of organizations in fostering peace.
- **Constitutional and Ethical Links in India:**
 - **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam:** The ancient Indian ethos that "The world is one family" aligns with the UN's vision of a common human destiny.
 - **Secularism:** Reflects India's constitutional commitment (under the **Preamble** and **Articles 25–28**) to treat all religions with equal respect (**Sarva Dharma Sambhava**).
 - **Fraternity:** Aligns with the fundamental duty of citizens to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood.
- **Preceding Initiatives:**
 - **Amman Message (2005):** Focused on clarifying the true, tolerant nature of Islam.

- **A Common Word (2007):** A landmark open letter emphasizing the common ground between Islam and Christianity to prevent global religious conflict.

Safer Internet Day 2026

What's the News?

- **Safer Internet Day 2026** was observed globally on **February 10, 2026**, with India launching extensive nationwide awareness programs emphasizing **safe and responsible use of Artificial Intelligence**.
- The **2026 theme: "AI Aware: Safe, Smart, and in Control"**; marks a strategic shift toward addressing AI-driven risks including **deepfakes, algorithmic bias, misinformation, and data privacy violations**.
- Indian government bodies including **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** and civil society organizations conducted **school programs, workshops, and digital literacy campaigns** targeting students, educators, and parents.
- The observance aligns with India's broader **Digital India** and **cybersecurity policy framework**, recognizing that **73% of people now use AI for educational purposes** and teens require structured guidance for safe AI engagement.

AI Aware Campaign: Objectives and Focus Areas

Core Theme Components

Element	Focus	Key Actions
AI Aware	Understanding AI systems and their influence	Recognizing AI-generated content, algorithmic bias, and misinformation
Safe	Protecting privacy and digital identity	Data protection, secure browsing, privacy settings management
Smart	Developing critical thinking and digital literacy	Evaluating online information, verifying sources, identifying deepfakes
In Control	Empowering user agency over technology	Managing screen time, controlling data sharing, ethical AI use

Critical Risk Areas Addressed

- **Deepfake proliferation:** AI-generated synthetic media used for disinformation and harassment.
- **Algorithmic addiction:** Recommendation systems driving excessive screen time and behavioral manipulation.
- **Data privacy violations:** Unauthorized collection and profiling of user data by AI applications.
- **Cyberbullying evolution:** AI-enabled harassment including automated targeting and synthetic media abuse.
- **Educational integrity:** Maintaining authentic learning in AI-assisted academic environments.

India's Digital Safety Initiatives

Government-Led Programs

- **National Informatics Centre (NIC):** Organized awareness sessions across state capitals including **Kohima**, focusing on **cyber hygiene** and **responsible AI usage** for government employees and students.
- **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY):** Coordinated with **CERT-In** (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) to issue advisories on **AI application security**.
- **National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI):** Promoted **.IN domain security** and **DNS security awareness**.

Civil Society and NGO Engagement

- **School-based interventions:** NGOs launched specialized programs in **Delhi** and metropolitan cities to facilitate **peer-to-peer discussions** on online harm, cyberbullying, and digital wellness.
- **Parental guidance modules:** Resources developed to help families establish **smarter online/offline boundaries** and **AI literacy conversations**.
- **Youth-centric approach:** Campaigns emphasized that **young people are central stakeholders** in creating safer digital ecosystems, not merely passive beneficiaries.

Global Context and Evolution

Historical Background

- **Origin:** Launched in **2004** as part of the **EU SafeBorders project**; institutionalized by the **Insafe network** (European network of Safer Internet Centres).
- **Global expansion:** By **2026**, celebrated in **over 180 countries and territories**, coordinated by the **joint Insafe-INHOPE network** with **European Commission** support.
- **US recognition: 2012;** formalized through agreement between **US Department of Homeland Security** and **European Commission**.

Thematic Evolution

Year	Theme	Focus Area
2021	"Together for a Better Internet"	General digital safety and inclusion
2024	"Inspiring Change? Making a Difference, Managing Influence, and Navigating Change Online"	Influence operations and digital resilience
2025	"Inspiring Change? Making a Difference, Managing Influence, and Navigating Change Online"	Continued focus on influence and change management

Year	Theme	Focus Area
2026	"AI Aware: Safe, Smart, and in Control"	Artificial Intelligence safety and literacy

Educational and Policy Implications

Digital Literacy Integration

- **Curriculum alignment:** AI safety modules being integrated into **NCERT** and **state education board** computer science curricula.
- **Teacher training:** **National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)** incorporating **AI awareness** into **B.Ed.** and **teacher professional development** programs.
- **Critical thinking frameworks:** Promotion of methodologies like **SIFT** (Stop, Investigate the source, Find better coverage, Trace claims) for information verification.

Regulatory Context

- **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023:** Establishes framework for **consent-based data processing** and **user rights**, relevant to AI application governance.
- **Information Technology Rules, 2021 (amended):** Address **intermediary liability** and **content moderation** for AI-generated harmful content.
- **National Cyber Security Policy:** Emphasizes **protection of critical information infrastructure** and **cyber hygiene promotion**.
- **Proposed AI Regulation:** **MeitY** developing **risk-based framework** for AI deployment, with focus on **algorithmic transparency** and **bias mitigation**.

Additional Info

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- **Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty):** **Supreme Court** has interpreted to include **right to privacy** (Puttaswamy judgment, 2017), extending to **digital privacy and data protection**.
- **Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression):** Balanced against **reasonable restrictions** under **Article 19(2)** for **public order, decency, and morality**; relevant to regulating harmful online content.
- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Primary legislation governing **cybercrime, electronic commerce, and digital governance**; amended in **2008** and **2021**.

Global Best Practices and Standards

- **IEEE Standards Association:** Developing technical standards for **AI transparency, accountability, and ethical design**.
- **UNESCO AI Ethics Recommendation: 2021;** first global normative framework on **AI ethics**; India endorsing principles of **human rights, fairness, and transparency**.
- **OECD AI Principles: 2019:** guidelines for **responsible AI stewardship** adopted by **G20** (including India).
- **Global Partnership on AI (GPAI):** India member since **2020**, focusing on **responsible AI development and use**.

Emerging Challenges and Policy Responses

Challenge	Policy/Regulatory Response
AI-generated deepfakes	IT Rules 2021 amendments requiring disclosure of AI-generated content ; proposed criminal penalties for malicious deepfakes
Child safety online	POCSO Act, 2012 provisions for online child sexual abuse material ; NCPDR guidelines for digital platforms
Data localization	Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023: sensitive personal data storage requirements
Algorithmic accountability	Draft National Data Governance Framework: principles for ethical AI and bias auditing

International Epilepsy Day 2026

What's the News?

- **International Epilepsy Day 2026** was observed on **February 9, 2026** (second Monday of February), with India conducting nationwide awareness programs under the theme **"#EpilepsyPledge"** (also articulated as **"Turning Stories into Action"**).
- The **2026 campaign** shifts focus from awareness to **actionable commitments**, urging individuals, institutions, and policymakers to take **one concrete step** toward improving safety, inclusion, and treatment access for the **50 million people globally** living with epilepsy.
- In India, where approximately **1 crore (10 million) people** have epilepsy, the government utilized the **District Mental Health Programme (DMHP)** to conduct **community-based awareness activities** targeting rural and underserved populations.
- The observance aligns with **WHO's Intersectoral Global Action Plan (IGAP) on Epilepsy and Other Neurological Disorders 2022–2031**, to which India is committed.

Epilepsy Pledge 2026: From Awareness to Action Campaign Framework

Component	Objective	Implementation
Individual pledges	Personal commitment to epilepsy understanding	Social media engagement using #EpilepsyPledge
Institutional pledges	Workplace/school safety protocols	Seizure first-aid training, inclusive policies
Policy pledges	Government action on treatment access	Integrating epilepsy into primary healthcare

Component	Objective	Implementation
Community pledges	Local support networks	Community health worker mobilization

Strategic Shift from 2025

- **2025 theme: "My Epilepsy Journey"** focused on **storytelling** and identifying unmet needs through lived experiences.
- **2026 theme: "Turning Stories into Action"** - emphasizes **measurable improvements** and **concrete commitments** based on previous year's insights.

India's Epilepsy Burden and Healthcare Response

Epidemiological Profile

Indicator	Data	Global/Regional Context
Prevalence	5.59-10 per 1,000	Higher than many developed nations
Total cases	~1 crore (10 million)	~20% of global burden in absolute numbers
Rural prevalence	1.9%	Significantly higher than urban (0.6%)
Treatment gap	75% in low-income settings	Majority lack access to anti-seizure medications
Disability prevalence	69.7% among patients	23.08% severe disability (Nehra et al. study)

Government Initiatives

District Mental Health Programme (DMHP)

- **Nodal agency: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** through **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP)**.
- **Community-based activities:** Regular awareness camps, detection drives, and treatment facilitation in **rural districts**.
- **Integration:** Epilepsy care incorporated into **primary healthcare** delivery at district level.

National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NP-NCD)

- **NPCDCS integration:** Epilepsy secondary to metabolic conditions addressed under broader **non-communicable disease** framework.
- **Risk factor management:** Focus on **stroke prevention, cardiovascular health, and perinatal care** to reduce epilepsy incidence.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

- **Recent inclusion: Chronic epilepsy** added to **draft disability rights bill** - enables **disability certificates, reservations, and social protection** benefits.
- **Legal recognition:** Shifts epilepsy from purely medical condition to **disability rights framework**.

Service Delivery Models in India

Model	Description	Status
Satellite clinics	Apex institutions extending	Operational in tertiary centers

Model	Description	Status
	services to periphery	
Camp approach	Specialist rural camps for detection and treatment	Periodic, stigma challenges persist
Primary healthcare integration	Training Medical Officers in epilepsy management	Scaling up under Ayushman Bharat
Community health workers	Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) for identification and referral	Active in National Health Mission areas
Telemedicine	Remote consultation for follow-up care	Expanding post-COVID-19

Global Framework and WHO Collaboration

Intersectoral Global Action Plan (IGAP) 2022-2031

- **Adopted: World Health Assembly Resolution WHA 73.10** (May 2022).
- **India's commitment:** One of **194 member states** endorsing the **10-year action plan**.
- **Five strategic objectives:**
 1. **Access to care:** 80% of people with epilepsy receiving treatment by 2031.
 2. **Stigma reduction:** Public awareness campaigns in 50% of countries.
 3. **Research and innovation:** Increased investment in epilepsy-specific research.
 4. **Health system strengthening:** Integration into primary healthcare.
 5. **Surveillance and data:** Improved epidemiological tracking.

WHO-ILAE-IBE Partnership

- **Global Campaign Against Epilepsy:** Launched **1997**; **2001** elevated to **highest WHO priority** for non-communicable diseases.
- **Out of the Shadows:** Longstanding advocacy initiative to reduce stigma and improve care quality.
- **International Epilepsy Day:** Joint initiative of **International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE)** and **International League Against Epilepsy (ILAE)** since **2015**.

Epilepsy Prevention Strategies

Primary Prevention

- **Perinatal care:** Improved **obstetric services** to prevent birth injuries.
- **Immunization: Japanese Encephalitis, measles** vaccines to prevent infection-related epilepsy.
- **Vector control: Malaria** prevention in endemic regions.
- **Food hygiene: Neurocysticercosis** prevention (tapeworm infection, major cause in India).

- **Injury prevention: Road safety** (helmets, seatbelts), **workplace safety** protocols.

Secondary Prevention

- **Early diagnosis: EEG and neuroimaging** access in district hospitals.
- **Treatment adherence: Phenobarbital and phenytoin** availability in **primary health centers** under **essential medicines list**.
- **Surgical intervention: Epilepsy surgery** at **NIMHANS, AIIMS, and SGPGI** for drug-resistant cases.

World Pulses Day 2026

What's the News?

- **World Pulses Day 2026** was observed globally on **February 10, 2026**, with the official FAO theme "**Pulses of the World: From Modesty to Excellence**" highlighting the transformation of pulses from humble traditional foods to globally recognized superfoods.
- India, the **world's largest producer and consumer of pulses**, leveraged the occasion to promote its **Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses**; a **₹11,440 crore** initiative launched in **October 2025** to achieve **self-sufficiency by December 2027**.
- The **2026 global theme** challenges lingering perceptions of pulses as merely "low-cost" or "rural" foods, emphasizing their **nutritional excellence, culinary diversity, and environmental sustainability**.
- The observance aligns with **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)** and **SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)**, and supports **India's Vision 2047** for a developed, food-secure nation.

2026 Theme: "Pulses of the World: From Modesty to Excellence"

Core Message

The theme addresses the **perception gap** where pulses are still associated with **modest, traditional diets** despite their **scientifically validated benefits**:

Dimension	"Modesty" Perception	"Excellence" Reality
Nutritional status	Basic sustenance food	Nutrient-dense superfood: high protein, fiber, iron, folate
Culinary role	Simple rural cuisine	Global culinary innovation: plant-based meat alternatives, gourmet dishes
Economic value	Low-cost commodity	High-value crop supporting 2 crore farmers and export potential

Dimension	"Modesty" Perception	"Excellence" Reality
Environmental impact	Conventional agriculture	Climate-smart crop: nitrogen-fixing, low water footprint, soil health improvement
Health contribution	Filling food	Non-communicable disease prevention: cardiovascular health, diabetes management

Global Celebrations

- **Host country: Kingdom of Spain** hosted the main global event at **Miguel Delibes Cultural Centre, Valladolid**.
- **Format:** Blend of **scientific discussions** and **culinary demonstrations** showcasing pulses' versatility.
- **Campaign tools:** FAO's "**Guide to World Pulses Day 2026**" provided resources for policymakers, farmers, educators, and consumers.

India's Pulses Sector: Mission for Aatmanirbharta Production and Import Context

Indicator	Data	Significance
Global ranking	#1 producer, consumer, and importer	India produces ~25% of world pulses but consumes ~27%
Production (2024-25)	252.38 lakh tonnes	31% increase from 192.6 lakh tonnes (2013-14)
Imports (2023-24)	47.38 lakh tonnes	Import dependency despite production growth
Import value (2024-25)	\$5.48 billion	Record imports highlighting supply-demand gap
Cultivation area	~242 lakh hectares	Target: 310 lakh hectares by 2030-31
Target production	350 lakh tonnes by 2030-31	Self-sufficiency by December 2027

Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses (2025–2031)

Financial and Temporal Framework

- **Total outlay:** **₹11,440 crore** over **6 years** (2025-26 to 2030-31).
- **Launch:** **October 11, 2025** by **PM Narendra Modi** at **IARI, New Delhi**.
- **Cabinet approval:** **October 1, 2025** following **Budget 2025-26** announcement.

Strategic Interventions

Component	Target/Scale	Implementation Mechanism
Seed distribution	126 lakh quintals certified seeds + 88 lakh free seed kits	SATHI portal for traceability; ICAR supervision
Area expansion	+35 lakh hectares (rice fallows, diversifiable lands)	Intercropping promotion, cluster-based approach
Processing infrastructure	1,000 new processing/packaging units	₹25 lakh/unit subsidy; NITI Aayog cluster recommendations
Assured procurement	100% procurement of Tur, Urad, Masoor at MSP	NAFED and NCCF under PM-AASHA (4 years)
Yield improvement	1,130 kg/ha (from 881 kg/ha)	Climate-resilient varieties, mechanization, bio-fertilizers
Farmer coverage	~2 crore farmers	Training through KVKs, state agriculture departments

Key Crops Prioritized

- Tur (Arhar/Pigeon Pea):** Major import substitute; **100% procurement assurance.**
- Urad (Black Gram):** Essential for **South Indian cuisine** and **protein security.**
- Masoor (Lentil):** **Rabi season** crop; rapid cooking variety preferred.

Operational Architecture

SATHI Portal (Seed Authentication, Traceability & Holistic Inventory)

- Developed by:** Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare + NIC.
- Function:** End-to-end seed supply chain automation; from production to certification to sale.
- Traceability:** Ensures quality assurance and prevents counterfeit seed circulation.

Cluster-Based Approach (NITI Aayog Recommendation)

- Coverage:** **416 focused districts** identified for intensive interventions.
- Rationale:** **Localized solutions** for specific agro-climatic conditions; efficient resource allocation.
- Geographic diversification:** Reduces concentration risk and optimizes logistics.

PM-AASHA Integration

- Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan:** Price assurance mechanism.
- Price Support Scheme (PSS):** Government procurement at **Minimum Support Price (MSP).**
- Market Intervention:** Stabilizes prices during glut periods.

Nutritional and Environmental Significance

Health Benefits

- Protein contribution:** Pulses provide **20–25% of total protein intake** in Indian diets (per **National Institute of Nutrition**).
- Consumption gap:** Per capita consumption (**~45-50 grams/day**) remains below recommended **85 grams/day**.
- Non-communicable disease prevention:** Low glycemic index, high fiber content supports **diabetes management** and **cardiovascular health**.
- Micronutrient security:** Rich in **iron, zinc, folate, and B-vitamins** - critical for **anemia reduction** and **maternal health**.

Environmental Sustainability

Benefit	Mechanism	Impact
Nitrogen fixation	Symbiotic bacteria in root nodules convert atmospheric nitrogen to soil nitrogen	Reduces synthetic fertilizer need by 25–40%
Soil health	Increases soil organic carbon and microbial activity	Improves fertility for subsequent crops
Water efficiency	Drought-tolerant; require less water than animal protein sources	Low water footprint compared to meat/dairy
Climate resilience	Short-duration varieties; adaptability to varied agro-ecologies	Risk mitigation for farmers
Biodiversity	Diverse species (lentils, chickpeas, beans, peas) support crop rotation	Sustainable intensification

Historical Evolution of Pulses Policy

Year	Initiative	Significance
1966	All India Coordinated Pulse Improvement Project	First systematic research on pulses

Year	Initiative	Significance
2010–14	Accelerated Pulses Production Programme (A3P)	Enhanced productivity focus
2016	International Year of Pulses (UN-FAO)	Global recognition of pulses' value
2018	National Food Security Mission (NFSM) – Pulses component	Integrated approach to production enhancement
2019	World Pulses Day established (UNGA)	Annual global observance (February 10)
2025	Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses launched	Self-sufficiency target by 2027

International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2026

What's the News?

- The **United Nations** observed the **International Day of Women and Girls in Science** on February 11 to promote full and equal access to and participation in science for women and girls.
- The 2026 observance marked a shift from raising awareness to implementing structural changes, with a heavy focus on leadership roles in emerging technologies like **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and **Cybersecurity**.
- In India, educational institutions like **IISc**, **IITs**, and **IIST** organized events highlighting the contributions of Indian women scientists in space missions and healthcare.

Theme: From Vision to Impact?

- **Official Theme:** The theme for 2026 is "**From Vision to Impact: Redefining STEM by Closing the Gender Gap.**"
- **Focus Areas:** It emphasizes moving beyond policy recommendations toward "impactful action" in four key domains: **Health Research**, **Cybersecurity**, **AI**, and **Scientific Entrepreneurship**.
- **Objective:** The goal is to dismantle systemic barriers such as the "leaky pipeline"—where women leave STEM careers at higher rates—and to ensure women lead in high-tech innovation.

India's Progress in STEM?

- **Rising Participation:** India has seen a steady increase in women's participation in scientific research. The share of female researchers rose from **13.9%** in 2015 to **18.7%** in 2018.
- **R&D Growth:** The number of women serving as **Primary Investigators (PIs)** in Research & Development (R&D) projects increased more than fourfold between 2000 and 2017.

- **Leadership in Space:** Indian women have reached significant milestones in space exploration, with leaders like **Nigar Shaji** (Project Director, **Aditya-L1**) and **Ritu Karidhal Shrivastava** (Mission Director, **Chandrayaan-3**) serving as global role models.

Additional Info

- **WIDUSHI Program:**
 - Launched by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)**, the **Women's Instinct for Developing and Ushering in Scientific Heights & Innovation (WIDUSHI)** program supports senior women scientists.
 - It provides fellowships of up to **₹85,000 per month** to ensure the continued participation of women in national science missions.
- **Global Statistics:**
 - Women currently represent only **33%** of researchers worldwide.
 - In cutting-edge fields like **AI**, women account for only **22%** of professionals.
 - According to **UNESCO**, only **35%** of all STEM students in higher education are women.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):**
 - The day directly contributes to **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** and **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)** by ensuring diversity in scientific inquiry.

World Radio Day 2026: Radio and Artificial Intelligence

What's the News?

- **World Radio Day** was observed globally on **February 13, 2026**, with the theme "**Radio and Artificial Intelligence**".
- The theme is built around the guiding principle: "**AI is a tool, not a voice**", emphasizing that while artificial intelligence is transforming radio broadcasting, **human judgment, ethics, and creativity** should remain central to journalism.
- The day highlights radio's role as one of the most **trusted and wide-reaching forms of mass communication**, particularly significant for communities without internet access, costly devices, or advanced digital skills.

History and Significance

- **Proclaimed by UNESCO** in **2011** and first observed in **2012**.
- **February 13** was chosen to mark the establishment of **United Nations Radio** in **1946**.
- Recognised by the **United Nations** as a global initiative to highlight radio's power to **inform, educate, unite, and empower communities**.
- Celebrated annually to raise awareness about the importance of radio technology and encourage support for broadcasters worldwide.

Why Radio Remains Relevant

- **Accessibility:** Does not rely on internet access or costly devices.

- **Democratic Reach:** Connects people across **economic, geographic, and social boundaries**.
- **Community Connection:** Strengthens democracy and informs communities.
- **Cultural Bridge:** Connects people across cultures and regions.
- **Resilience:** Continues functioning during disasters when other communication systems fail.

AI Integration in Radio Broadcasting

Opportunities:

- **Automated content generation** and scheduling.
- **Personalised programming** for diverse audiences.
- **Enhanced accessibility** through voice synthesis and translation.
- **Data-driven insights** for better content strategy.
- **Efficient resource management** in newsrooms.

Ethical Considerations:

- **Human oversight** must remain paramount in editorial decisions.
- **Transparency** about AI-generated content.
- **Preservation of authentic human voices** in journalism.
- **Prevention of algorithmic bias** in programming.

Iconic Moments in Radio History

- **Roosevelt's Fireside Chats (1933):** Revolutionised presidential communication during the banking crisis.
- **NHK Japan Tsunami Broadcasts (2011):** Served as vital lifeline during Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, guiding evacuations despite power outages.
- **Jawaharlal Nehru's Independence Speeches:** United millions across India during key national events.
- **Winston Churchill's WWII Speeches (1940):** Boosted British morale during conflict.
- **The War of the Worlds (1938):** Orson Welles' broadcast demonstrated radio's powerful influence on public perception.

Indian Radio Legends

Melville de Mellow

- Legendary **All India Radio (AIR)** broadcaster.
- Famous for **seven-hour coverage of Mahatma Gandhi's funeral procession**; regarded as one of the most powerful moments in Indian radio history.

Ameen Sayani

- Known as the "**Golden Voice**" of Indian radio.
- Hosted **Geetmala** from **1952 to 1994**.
- Built community connection through his warm, friendly presentation style.

Vinod Kashyap

- AIR newsreader during the **1971 India-Pakistan war**.
- Continued broadcasting despite air-raid sirens and personal risk.
- Known for her powerful voice that captivated listeners nationwide.

Sushil Javeri

- Veteran AIR broadcaster since **1955**.
- One of India's most respected **English newsreaders**.
- Known for precise pronunciation and clear delivery.

Ramanuj Prasad Singh

- Renowned **Hindi newsreader** who joined AIR in **1966**.
- Former psychology lecturer turned broadcaster.

- Recognisable by his deep, relaxed voice and clear delivery.

Additional Info

All India Radio (AIR):

- **Established:** 1936 (formerly Indian State Broadcasting Service).
- **Network:** Over **470 broadcasting centres** across India.
- **Languages:** Broadcasts in **23 languages** and **179 dialects**.
- **Reach:** Covers **99% of India's population** and **92% of its area**.
- **External Services:** Broadcasts to over **100 countries** in **27 languages**.

Community Radio in India:

- **First Community Radio Station:** **Anna FM** (2004), Chennai.
- **Current Status:** Over **400 operational community radio stations**.
- **Focus:** Local issues, agriculture, health, education, and community development.

World Day of Social Justice 2026

What's the News?

- **World Day of Social Justice** is observed annually on **February 20** to promote international efforts in tackling issues such as poverty, exclusion, gender inequality, unemployment, and social protection.
- The **United Nations (UN)** and the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** lead the global observance to advocate for a "Social Contract" that ensures fairness and dignity for all.
- The **2026 Theme** is: "**Bridging Gaps, Building Alliances: A Global Call for Social Justice**", focusing on international cooperation to fix systemic inequalities.

Four Pillars of Social Justice

- **Human Rights:**
 - Ensuring fundamental freedoms and dignity for all individuals.
 - Protects against discrimination based on caste, gender, or religion.
- **Labour Rights:**
 - Promotes fair wages, safe working conditions, and rights of workers.
 - Aligns with **International Labour Organization (ILO)** conventions.
- **Social Protection:**
 - Provides security against life risks such as old age, sickness, and unemployment.
 - Includes pensions, healthcare, and unemployment benefits.
- **Social Dialogue:**
 - Encourages negotiation between governments, employers, and workers.
 - Fosters consensus on economic and social policies.

Additional Info

- **Historical Context:**

- **UNGA Resolution:** Proclaimed by the United Nations in **2007** (Resolution 62/10).
- **First Observance:** First observed globally in **2009**.
- **World Summit for Social Development:** Held in **Copenhagen (1995)**, laid the groundwork for global social justice commitments.
- **Constitutional Provisions (India):**
 - **Preamble:**
 - Secures **Justice** (Social, Economic, and Political) to all citizens.
 - **Fundamental Rights:**
 - **Article 14:** Equality before law and equal protection of laws.
 - **Article 15:** Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
 - **Article 16:** Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.
 - **Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP):**
 - **Article 38:** State to secure a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people.
 - **Article 39:** Equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.
 - **Article 41:** Right to work, to education, and to public assistance.

National Science Day 2026: Celebrating India's Scientific Heritage and Future

What's the News?

India observed **National Science Day 2026** on **February 28** to commemorate the discovery of the **Raman Effect** by **Sir C.V. Raman** in 1928. The day marks a historic milestone in Indian science—Raman's discovery later earned him the **1930 Nobel Prize in Physics**, making him the first Indian scientist to receive a Nobel in the sciences. The 2026 celebration focused on empowering youth and recognizing women's contributions to scientific research, aligning with India's vision of becoming a developed nation through science and innovation.

The Raman Effect: Foundation of Modern Spectroscopy

The Discovery

- **Date:** February 28, 1928
- **Scientist:** **Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman** (1888–1970)
- **Phenomenon:** When light passes through a transparent material, a portion of it changes wavelength due to molecular interaction
- **Significance:** Proved that light scattering could reveal molecular composition without damaging samples

Applications of Raman Spectroscopy

- **Medicine & Healthcare:** Biological sample analysis, disease detection
- **Forensic Science:** Evidence examination and material identification
- **Chemistry & Material Science:** Compound and structure analysis

- **Environmental Studies:** Pollutant monitoring and analysis
- **Telecommunications:** Optical fiber technology development

*National Science Day 2026 Theme

Theme: "Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat" - [News18](#)

Theme: "Empowering Indian Youth for Global Leadership in Science and Innovation for Viksit Bharat."

" - [TimesofIndia](#)

Historical Context & Institutional Framework

- **First celebrated:** 1987
- **Recommendation:** **National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC)** in 1986.
- **Organizing authority:** **Department of Science and Technology (DST)**, Government of India.
- **Also known as:** **Rashtriya Vigyan Diwas.**

India's Scientific Progress: 2025-2026 Highlights

Global Rankings

- **Global Innovation Index 2025:** Ranked **38th**
- **Intellectual Property Filings (WIPO):** Ranked **6th** worldwide
- **Research Publications:** Ranked **3rd** globally
- **Network Readiness Index:** Significant improvement in digital technology adoption.

Space & Defence Achievements

- **ISRO SpaDeX Mission:** Successful space docking experiment (January 2025) — placed India among elite nations with this capability.
- **100th Launch:** Completed from Satish Dhawan Space Centre.
- **Third Launch Pad:** Approved to support **Gaganyaan** human spaceflight programme.
- **Aditya-L1:** Continued solar mission data transmission.
- **Astronaut Mission:** **Shubhanshu Shukla** completed 18-day mission aboard International Space Station (July 2025).

Technology & Computing

- **DHRUV64:** India's first fully indigenous **64-bit microprocessor** (developed by **C-DAC**).
- **Vikram 3201:** ISRO's space-grade microprocessor.
- **India Semiconductor Mission:** Multiple projects approved for domestic chip manufacturing.
- **National Supercomputing Mission:** Expanded high-performance computing infrastructure.

Artificial Intelligence & Quantum Computing

- **BharatGen:** Indigenous multilingual AI model for Indian languages.
- **MadhuNetrAI:** AI tool for diabetic retinopathy detection in healthcare.
- **AI in Agriculture:** Monsoon forecasts delivered to farmers via SMS.
- **QpiAI-Indus:** 25-qubit quantum computer launched by Bengaluru startup.
- **"Kaveri" Processor:** 64-qubit quantum processor developed under **National Quantum Mission**.

Research Infrastructure

- **Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme:** **₹1 lakh crore** fund approved to boost private R&D investment.

- **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF):**
Launched to improve university-industry coordination.
-



State Affairs

Odisha CM Announces ₹909 Crore Development Package for Subarnapur

What's the News?

Odisha Chief Minister **Mohan Charan Majhi** announced a comprehensive development package totaling **₹909 crore** for **Subarnapur district** during his visit. This includes **58 projects worth ₹276 crore** (inaugurated/foundation stone laid) and **new initiatives worth ₹633 crore**. The announcement was made at the **Subhadra Shakti Mela**, where the CM also disbursed **₹126 crore** in interest-free loans to **1,848 women Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**. Additionally, **₹35 crore** was announced for developing the **Bhima Bhoi Samadhi Peeth** at Khaliapali.

Subhadra Shakti Mela?

- **Event:** Platform for women entrepreneurs and SHGs showcasing products (handicrafts, millet-based goods, organic produce, terracotta, bamboo crafts).
- **Financial Support:** ₹126 crore interest-free loans disbursed to 1,848 SHGs in Subarnapur district.
- **Objective:** Strengthen women-led enterprises, promote self-reliance, and enhance rural livelihoods.
- **Broader Context:**
 - **Subhadra Yojana** is Odisha's largest economic initiative, benefiting **98 lakh women** with disbursements exceeding **₹4,900 crore**.
 - Target to create **25 lakh Lakhpati Didis** by 2027 under PM's flagship scheme.
 - **FY 2024-25:** Interest relief of **₹300 crore** for **3 lakh SHGs** on bank loans up to ₹10 lakh.
 - Revolving funds for SHGs doubled from **₹15,000 to ₹30,000** per group.
 - Community investment funds for gram panchayat-level federations increased from **₹35 lakh to ₹60 lakh**.

₹633 Crore New Initiatives?

Project	Cost	Sector
Sub-surface reservoir at Marudagochha	₹557 crore	Irrigation
Open-air theatre at Culture Bhavan/Sanskriti Bhawan	₹11.23 crore	Culture
Renovation of Gandhi Stadium	₹25.28 crore	Sports
Improvement of Block Chhak Junction Road	₹4.23 crore	Urban Infrastructure

- **Total:** ₹633 crore for irrigation, culture, sports, and urban infrastructure.
- **Significance:** Marudagochha reservoir aims to strengthen irrigation facilities in the western Odisha district.

58 Projects Worth ₹276 Crore?

- **Foundation Stones Laid:** 24 projects costing ₹173 crore.

- **Inaugurated:** 34 projects valued at ₹103 crore.
- **Sectors Covered:** Roads, drinking water supply, irrigation, education, health infrastructure, rural development, and urban development.
- **Expected Impact:** Strengthen district infrastructure and ensure balanced growth across rural and urban areas.

Bhima Bhoi Samadhi Peeth Development?

- **Allocation:** ₹35 crore for comprehensive development.
- **Location:** Khaliapali village, ~16 km from Sonepur town, Subarnapur district.
- **Significance:**
 - Memorial of **Santha Kabi Bhima Bhoi** (1846-1895), 19th-century poet-saint and social reformer from Kondh tribal community.
 - Propagated **Mahima Dharma**, emphasizing monotheism, social equality, rejection of caste hierarchies and idolatry.
 - Major works: *Stuti Chintamani*, *Bhajanamala*.
 - **First to allow women entry** into religious fold in 19th-century Odisha.
 - Site attracts devotees from Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Historical Context:** Previous restoration initiated by IAS officer **Bishnupada Sethi** in 1999 when he was Sonepur Collector, transforming the site from ruins to a pilgrimage center.

Odisha Hosts Black Swan Summit India 2026 Under BharatNetra Initiative

What's the News?

- The **Government of Odisha** launched the **Black Swan Summit India 2026** in **Bhubaneswar**, inaugurated by **President Droupadi Murmu**, as a flagship event under the **BharatNetra initiative**.
- The summit is organised in partnership with the **Global Finance & Technology Network (GFTN)** and aims to position Odisha as a **global hub for digital finance, AI, and future-ready workforce development**.
- Over **1,700 participants from 24 countries** and nearly **100 speakers from 11 countries** participated, making it a significant global convening on **FinTech, InsurTech, and artificial intelligence**.

BharatNetra Framework?

- **Strategic Vision:** An integrated framework launched following an MoU signed during the visit of **Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam** to Odisha in January 2025.
- **Four Pillars:**
 - **Global Learning:** Job-linked skilling programmes, including a **five-month hybrid FinTech & InsurTech certificate** with **National University of Singapore's Asian Institute of Digital Finance (NUS-AIDF)**.

- **Global Mindshare:** High-level policy dialogues and investment forums (exemplified by Black Swan Summit).
- **Global Innovation:** Centre of Excellence and startup ecosystem in FinTech/InsurTech under **IT Policy 2025** and upcoming **FinTech Policy**.
- **Global Capability: GCC Promotion Policy 2025** to attract **Global Capability Centres** in advanced digital finance.
- **Target:** Train **7,000 students** over five years and create pathways for global employment.

Key Outcomes & MoUs

- **Corporate Partnerships:** MoUs with firms including **Advanze Tech, Spice Money, Surfin, Symbo Insurtech, Universal Pensions** and others for internships, apprenticeships, capstone projects, and startup mentorship.
- **Women's Entrepreneurship:** Partnership with **Ant International** to enable **e-commerce for Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**; covering **75 lakh women** in **7.5 lakh SHGs**.
- **Startup Global Access:** MoU between **Startup Policy Forum India** and **GFTN** to connect Indian startups with international mentors, forums, and investors.
- **Skilling-to-Employment Pipeline:** First cohort of **385 participants** in the NUS-AIDF programme; **195 graduated** with industry interviews and job fair opportunities. Top performers selected for **MUFG Young Innovators initiative (Japan)** and **Singapore FinTech Festival**.

Odisha's Digital Governance Foundation

- **OSWAS Platform: Odisha Secretariat Workflow Automation System** — operational since 2008, serving **50,000 users** across **5,000 offices** with **40 lakh files** and **3 crore documents** processed.
- **AI Integration: AI Champions** designated in each department; "**Suśāsan Sahayak**" chatbot launched for government employees to navigate **Odisha General Financial Rules** and procurement norms.
- **Paperless Target:** Full transition to paperless governance by **March 2027** with seamless internet-based file access.

Significance for State-Led Digital Transformation

- **Fiscal Credibility:** Odisha ranks **number one on NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index**, with **debt-to-GSDP ratio of 13.5%** (well below 25% FRBM threshold) and **revenue surplus of ₹31,000 crore**.
- **Execution Hub:** Positions Odisha as a **testbed for scalable AI and FinTech models** that can inform national frameworks, moving beyond policy articulation to large-scale implementation.
- **Demographic Dividend:** Nearly **69% of population** is of working age; skilling focus aligns with "**Skilled in Odisha, Skilled for the World**" vision.

DRDO Successfully Demonstrates Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR) Technology

What's the News?

- The **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** recently conducted a successful flight demonstration of the **Solid Fuel Ducted Ramjet (SFDR)** technology.
- The test, carried out at the **Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur**, off the coast of Odisha, validated all critical mission objectives.
- This achievement places India in an **elite league of nations** possessing advanced propulsion technology required for long-range air-to-air missiles.
- All major subsystems, including the **nozzle-less booster, solid fuel ducted ramjet motor, and fuel flow controller**, performed as per expectations.

What is SFDR Technology?

- **Air-Breathing Propulsion:** SFDR is a missile propulsion system that uses **atmospheric oxygen** for combustion, unlike conventional rocket motors that must carry both fuel and an oxidizer.
- **Operating Principle:** It relies on the missile's high forward speed to compress incoming air through **ram air intakes**, eliminating the need for complex rotating compressors.
- **Supersonic Sustainment:** The technology enables missiles to maintain high supersonic speeds (ranging from **Mach 2 to Mach 3.8**) for much longer durations compared to traditional systems.
- **Initial Propulsion:** Since ramjets do not produce thrust at zero speed, the missile is first accelerated by a **nozzle-less booster** to reach the required Mach number before the ramjet activates.

Significance and Impact

- **Extended Engagement Range:** SFDR enables the development of missiles with a strike range between **50 km and 340 km**, providing a decisive "first-look, first-shoot" advantage.
- **Wider No-Escape Zone:** By maintaining high velocity and energy until the moment of impact, the technology ensures enemy aircraft have minimal chance of evasion.
- **High Manoeuvrability:** The system supports high 'g' maneuvers at altitudes up to **20 km**, significantly enhancing combat effectiveness against agile aerial targets.
- **Indigenous Development:** Led by **Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL)** in Hyderabad, the project reduces reliance on foreign propulsion technologies and supports the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** initiative.

Additional Info

- **Participating Laboratories:**
 - **Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL)**, Hyderabad (Lead lab).
 - **Research Centre Imarat (RCI)**, Hyderabad.

- **High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL)**, Pune.
- **Technical Components:**
 - **Fuel Sustainer:** Uses **boron-based** high-energy solid fuel for long-duration powered flight.
 - **Hot Gas Valve:** An indigenous component made of advanced **carbon-carbon composites** to regulate combustion gases.
 - **Air Intakes:** Titanium-alloy cheek-mounted intakes that open using a **pyrotechnic mechanism**.

Operation Kiya: Security Forces Neutralize Two Terrorists in J&K's Udhampur

What's the News?

- The **Indian Army** and **Jammu and Kashmir Police** conducted a successful joint counter-terror operation named **Operation Kiya** in the **Udhampur** district.
- The operation resulted in the elimination of two terrorists belonging to the **Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)** outfit in the **Basantgarh** area.
- Security forces recovered a significant cache of high-tech weaponry, including an **M4 Carbine** and **AK-47** rifles, thwarting potential terror activities in the Jammu region.

Operation Kiya

- **Joint Security Grid:** Conducted by **Indian Army's White Knight Corps, Counter Insurgency Force (Delta), Jammu & Kashmir Police, and CRPF**.
- **Execution:** Based on specific intelligence inputs, forces established a tight cordon in the densely forested terrain to prevent terrorist escape.
- **Duration:** Over **20-hour-long operation** involving intense gunfire and calibrated assault on a cave hideout where terrorists were trapped.
- **Tactical Approach:**
 - Contact established with terrorists; continuous surveillance maintained to prevent breakout.
 - Night-long vigil using drones and reinforcements (paratroopers, dog squads) deployed.
 - Final assault conducted after dawn with deafening explosions reported during cave storming.

Additional Info

- **Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM):**
 - Pakistan-based terror outfit active in J&K, designated as a terrorist organisation under India's **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.
 - Founded by **Masood Azhar**, responsible for multiple attacks including the **2019 Pulwama attack**.
- **White Knight Corps:**

- Indian Army formation responsible for military operations in the Jammu region.
- Headquartered at **Nagrota, Jammu**.
- **Security Context:**
 - Part of intensified operations in Jammu division following recent encounters in **Kathua** and **Kishtwar** districts.
 - Previous encounter in Udhampur occurred in December at Soan village where terrorists had escaped.
 - The neutralised terrorists were linked to the same group involved in earlier encounters in the region.
- **Constitutional & Legal Framework:**
 - **Article 355:** Imposes duty on the Centre to protect states from external aggression and internal disturbance.
 - **UAPA, 1967:** Legal framework for banning terrorist organisations and prosecuting terror activities.
 - **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA):** Provides special powers to armed forces in disturbed areas (applicable in parts of J&K).

India Successfully Test-Fires Agni-III Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile

What's the News?

- India successfully test-fired the **Agni-III Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM)** from the **Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur, Odisha**.
- The launch was conducted by the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** as part of a **routine training exercise** to validate operational and technical preparedness.
- Defence officials confirmed that all **mission objectives were met** and all parameters were successfully validated, reinforcing the missile's reliability within India's nuclear triad.

Agni-III Missile: Technical Specifications

- **Type:** **Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM)** — two-stage, solid-fuelled.
- **Range:** **3,000–3,500 km**, enabling coverage of strategic targets across extended regional theatres.
- **Payload Capacity:** **1,500 kg** — capable of carrying both **conventional and nuclear warheads** with estimated yields of **200–300 kilotons**.
- **Dimensions:** **16.7 metres** in length, **2 metres** in diameter, with a launch weight of **48,300 kg**.
- **Guidance System:** **Strapdown Inertial Navigation System (INS)** supported by **GPS**, achieving accuracy of approximately **40 metres Circular Error Probable (CEP)**.
- **Propulsion:**
 - **First stage:** Maraging steel motor case with thrust vector control.
 - **Second stage:** Carbon-fibre motor case with thrust vector control for improved stability and precision.

- **Operational Status:** Inducted into **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** in **2011** and forms a key component of India's land-based nuclear deterrent.

Strategic Significance

- **Credible Minimum Deterrence:** Enhances India's **second-strike capability** and strengthens strategic depth beyond short- and medium-range systems.
- **Operational Readiness:** Validates reliability of nuclear delivery systems under operational command, ensuring **force readiness** for strategic deterrence.
- **Missile Spectrum Coverage:** Complements the broader **Agni missile series:**
 - **Agni-I:** 700–1,200 km (short-range)
 - **Agni-II:** 2,000–3,000 km (medium-range)
 - **Agni-III:** 3,000–3,500 km (intermediate-range)
 - **Agni-IV:** 3,500–4,000 km (intermediate-range)
 - **Agni-V:** 5,000+ km (intercontinental-range)

Additional Info

- **Strategic Forces Command (SFC):**
 - Established in **2003** as part of India's **Nuclear Command Authority (NCA)**.
 - Responsible for operational control and deployment of nuclear assets.
 - Headed by a **Commander-in-Chief** (three-star rank) from the Indian Navy, with rotation among services.
- **Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur:**
 - Premier missile testing facility under **DRDO** located on the Odisha coast.
 - Supports testing of ballistic missiles, anti-ballistic missile systems, and other strategic weapons.
- **Nuclear Command Authority Structure:**
 - **Political Council:** Chaired by **Prime Minister** — sole authority for nuclear weapons use decisions.
 - **Executive Council:** Chaired by **National Security Advisor** — advises Political Council and coordinates execution.
 - **SFC:** Executes operational directives and maintains readiness of nuclear forces.
- **No-First-Use Policy:** India's declared nuclear doctrine commits to **no-first-use** of nuclear weapons, emphasizing **credible minimum deterrence** and **second-strike capability**.

VOC Port Becomes India's First to Deploy Anti-Drone System

What's the News?

- The **V.O. Chidambaranar (VOC) Port Authority** in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, has become the first major port in India to initiate the implementation of an advanced **Anti-Drone Security System**.
- The port signed a formal agreement with **Central Electronics Limited (CEL)**, a public sector enterprise under the **Ministry of Science and Technology**, to deploy the system.

- This move aims to secure critical maritime infrastructure against unauthorized aerial threats, ensuring the safety of cargo, personnel, and strategic assets.
- The project is scheduled for completion and full commissioning within **three months**.

The Anti-Drone Shield?

- **Technology Integration:** Combines **Radio Frequency (RF)** and **radar-based detection** systems tailored for complex port environments.
- **Coverage:** Provides **360-degree omnidirectional coverage** with an effective operational range of up to **5 kilometres**.
- **Components:**
 - **Drone Detector:** Identifies unauthorised unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).
 - **Drone Detection Radar:** Tracks and classifies aerial threats in real-time.
 - **Man-Pack Jammer:** Portable electronic countermeasure device for neutralising threats.
- **Operational Functions:** Enables **real-time detection, tracking, classification, and neutralisation** of unauthorised drones.
- **Deployment:** Designed for **quick deployment** in sensitive operational zones, enhancing security flexibility.

Additional Info

- **V.O. Chidambaranar Port:**
 - Formerly known as **Tuticorin Port**, it is one of the 13 major ports in India, located on the East Coast in Tamil Nadu.
 - It is a multi-purpose port handling diverse cargo, including coal, containers, and fertilizers.
- **Anti-Drone Technology Types:**
 - **Soft-Kill:** Uses jamming to disrupt the drone's communication links or spoofing to provide false GPS coordinates.
 - **Hard-Kill:** Involves the physical destruction of the drone using lasers, projectiles, or kinetic energy (e.g., **DRDO's D4 system**).
- **Policy Context:**
 - **National Counter Rogue Drones Guidelines (2019):** Provides a framework for the deployment of counter-UAV measures at critical national installations.
 - **Major Port Authorities Act, 2021:** Grants greater autonomy to major ports to modernize and make strategic security investments.

Defence Ministry Frames Fresh Guidelines for Military Publications

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Defence (MoD)** is formulating comprehensive **publication guidelines** for serving and retired armed forces personnel following controversy over former Army Chief **General M.M. Naravane's** unpublished memoir "*Four Stars of Destiny*".

- The proposed framework aims to standardize the clearance process for manuscripts and incorporate provisions of the **Official Secrets Act, 1923**, which continues to bind personnel even after retirement.
- The move addresses current regulatory gaps, as India lacks a **single unified law** governing book publications by former military officers.

The Naravane Memoir Controversy

- **Unpublished Content Cited:** Leader of Opposition **Rahul Gandhi** quoted excerpts from the memoir in **Lok Sabha** regarding the **2020 India-China border standoff**, triggering government protests that the book lacked defence establishment clearance.
- **Speaker's Intervention:** The Lok Sabha Speaker barred further references to the text, terming it "**unauthenticated unpublished content**".
- **Legal Action:** **Delhi Police** registered an **FIR** over alleged unauthorized circulation of a preprint version, investigating how manuscript portions entered the public domain.
- **Publisher's Clarification:** **Penguin Random House India** (sole publishing rights holder) and General Naravane confirmed **no copies have been published** in any format, and any circulating version constitutes **copyright infringement**.

Proposed Guidelines Framework

- **Scope:** Covers both **serving** and **retired** personnel across Army, Navy, and Air Force.
- **Clearance Process:** Will spell out mandatory submission and verification procedures before publication approval.
- **Legal Foundation:** Builds upon:
 - **Official Secrets Act, 1923** provisions (lifelong applicability).
 - **Defence Service Regulations** for serving personnel.
 - **Army Act** provisions where applicable.
- **Objective:** Close procedural gaps and prevent unauthorized disclosure of **sensitive operational information, classified material, and intelligence inputs**.

Current Regulatory Landscape

For Serving Personnel

- **Mandatory Prior Permission:** **Defence Service Regulations** require **written clearance** before undertaking any literary, political, or remunerative activity outside official duties.
- **Prohibited Content:** Classified information, operational details, internal procedures, equipment capabilities, intelligence inputs, and matters affecting **national security** or **foreign relations**.
- **Approval Chain:** Requests routed through command structure up to **Army Headquarters** or **MoD** depending on content sensitivity.

For Retired Personnel

- **No Specific Service Rules:** Retired officers fall outside **Army Act** jurisdiction on publication matters.
- **Official Secrets Act Applies:** Lifelong criminal liability for disclosing classified or operationally sensitive material.

- **Expected Protocol:** Voluntary submission of manuscripts containing sensitive content to MoD for **verification and clearance**.
- **Self-Regulation:** Relies largely on individual **maturity and judgment** regarding what constitutes classified vs. public domain information.

Official Secrets Act, 1923

- **Colonial-Era Legislation:** Enacted April 2, 1923, to consolidate laws protecting official information and prevent espionage.
- **Applicability:** Covers **all persons** including government servants, defence personnel, private individuals, and companies; extends to Indian citizens **outside India**.
- **Spying (Section 3):** Punishes approaching prohibited places, making sketches, or collecting information useful to enemies; imprisonment up to **14 years** for defence-related offences, **3 years** for other cases.
- **Wrongful Communication (Section 5):** Criminalizes unauthorized sharing, retention, or misuse of official codes, documents, or information affecting **sovereignty, integrity, security, or friendly relations with foreign states**.
- **Special Rule of Evidence:** For military offences, conviction possible based on **circumstances, conduct, or known character** without proving specific prejudicial acts.
- **Trial Restrictions (Section 13):** Courts can take cognizance only upon complaint authorized by **appropriate Government**.
- **Closed Proceedings (Section 14):** Courts may exclude public during trial if evidence publication may prejudice State security.

DRDO-CSIR Partnership for Extreme Environment Survival Technologies

What's the News?

- **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** and **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)** have signed a significant agreement to foster **collaborative research, technology development, and resource sharing**.
- The partnership aims to advance **human sustenance and performance in extreme environments**, addressing critical needs for India's armed forces and scientific endeavours.

Focus Areas

High-Altitude Survival Systems

- Design and development of instruments for **high-altitude survivability**.
- Target regions include India's border areas along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** with China, where altitudes exceed **4,000 metres**.
- Key challenges addressed: **oxygen scarcity, extreme cold, and isolation**.
- Technologies include:
 - Advanced **oxygen delivery systems**.
 - **Thermal insulation** suited to sub-zero temperatures.

Human Performance Restoration

- Development of solutions to counter **acute mountain sickness, hypoxia, and fatigue**.
- Prolonged exposure to extreme altitudes degrades operational readiness.
- Innovations include:
 - **Portable medical kits**.
 - **Physiological monitoring devices**.
 - **Recovery protocols** for rapid rehabilitation of troops deployed in **Ladakh** or **Siachen Glacier**.

Off-Grid Energy Systems

- Sustainable power solutions for remote outposts lacking reliable electricity.
- Current reliance on fuel logistics is vulnerable to supply disruptions.
- Technologies under development:
 - **Solar-hybrid solutions**
 - **Compact fuel cells**
 - **Kinetic energy harvesters** for communications, heating, and life-support equipment.

Waste Management in Extreme Terrains

- Addressing environmental and health hazards from **non-biodegradable waste accumulation**.
- High-altitude camps face contamination risks due to inaccessibility.
- Solutions include:
 - **Compact incinerators**.
 - **Bio-digesters adapted for cold climates**.
 - **Recyclable material processors**.

Operation Demolishment: Razing Maoist Memorials in Bastar

What's the News?

- Security forces in **Chhattisgarh** have launched **Operation Demolishment**, a targeted initiative to dismantle memorials and structures erected by **Maoists** in the **Bastar** division.
- The operation is being carried out by coordinated teams of the **District Reserve Guard (DRG)**, **Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)**, and **Special Task Force (STF)**.
- The primary goal is to reclaim physical and psychological territory from **Left-Wing Extremists (LWE)** by removing symbols of their influence and "martyrdom."
- Security personnel have successfully razed over **200 Maoist memorials** across various districts in the region.

Operation Demolishment?

- **Overview:** A counter-insurgency initiative focused on dismantling Naxal-built memorials used for ideological outreach, recruitment, and commemorative gatherings
- **Execution:** Conducted by Indian security forces in coordination with state police and counter-insurgency agencies
- **Scale of Operations:**
 - **Total demolitions:** 203 structures across Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh

- **Chhattisgarh:** 149 memorials demolished (130 in 2026 alone)
- **Maharashtra:** 55 memorials demolished (45 in 2026 alone)
- **Notable Structure:** A 64-foot memorial at **Komatpalli village** (Bijapur district), demolished in January 2025, previously served as a gathering site for top Maoist leaders and **Battalion 1** of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA)

Additional Info

- **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) Context:**
 - **Red Corridor:** LWE-affected districts spanning central and eastern India
 - **Primary States:** Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana
 - **Armed Wing: People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA)** – military wing of Communist Party of India (Maoist)
 - **Battalion 1:** Elite and most dangerous unit of PLGA, often involved in high-profile attacks
- **Constitutional & Legal Framework:**
 - **Article 355:** Union's duty to protect states against external aggression and internal disturbance (basis for central deployment)
 - **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967:** Primary legislation banning terrorist and unlawful organizations, including CPI (Maoist)
 - **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Relevant for tribal land rights in LWE-affected regions
- **Recent Trends:**
 - Over **520 Maoists killed** in Bastar region in the last three years
 - Significant increase in surrenders and security camp establishment in former "liberated zones"
 - Shift from defensive to offensive operations in core Maoist strongholds

PRAHAAR: India's First National Counter-Terrorism Policy

What's the News?

- The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** unveiled **PRAHAAR**, India's inaugural **National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy**, formalising a unified doctrinal framework to combat evolving security threats.
- The policy adopts a **zero-tolerance stance** against terrorism, explicitly rejecting any linkage between terror and religion, ethnicity, nationality, or civilisation.
- It emphasises a **proactive, intelligence-led approach** to disrupt terror ecosystems while ensuring strict adherence to **human rights** and the **rule of law**.

PRAHAAR: The Seven-Pillar Framework

- **Overview:** The acronym **PRAHAAR** (meaning "strike") encapsulates seven strategic pillars guiding India's counter-terror architecture:

- **Prevention of terrorist attacks** through intelligence-led operations.
- **Response** that is swift, graded, and proportionate to the threat.
- **Aggregation of capacities** across agencies for a **whole-of-government** approach.
- **Human rights-compliant** processes and legal safeguards.
- **Attenuation of conditions** conducive to radicalisation and violent extremism.
- **Aligning international cooperation** for intelligence sharing and extradition.
- **Recovery and resilience** through a **whole-of-society** engagement model.

Threat Landscape & Strategic Focus

- **Persistent Threats:** Cross-border terrorism, state-sponsored proxies, and global outfits like **Al-Qaeda** and **ISIS** attempting to activate sleeper cells.
- **Emerging Challenges:**
 - Use of **drones**, encrypted messaging, dark web, and cryptocurrencies for logistics, funding, and propaganda.
 - Convergence of terror networks with **organised crime** for recruitment and resource mobilisation.
 - Risks of **CBRNED** (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive, Digital) material acquisition by non-state actors.
- **Critical Infrastructure Protection:** Enhanced security protocols for power grids, railways, aviation, ports, defence installations, and atomic energy facilities.

Institutional Mechanism & Implementation

- **Intelligence Coordination:** **Multi Agency Centre (MAC)** and **Joint Task Force on Intelligence** serve as nodal hubs for real-time threat assessment and inter-agency action.
- **Operational Response:**
 - **Local police** act as first responders, supported by State Counter-Terror Units and **National Security Guard (NSG)** for major incidents.
 - **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** leads investigations with focus on high conviction rates under laws like the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.
- **Capacity Building:** Standardisation of training, equipment, and procedures across States; modernisation of forensic and cyber-investigation capabilities.

INS Anjadip: Strengthening India's Shallow Water Anti-Submarine Warfare

What's the News?

- The **Indian Navy** is set to commission **INS Anjadip**, the third ship of the **Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW SWC)** project.
- The vessel is designed to detect and neutralize enemy submarines in coastal or littoral waters.
- This commissioning marks a significant step toward **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** (Self-Reliant India) in

defense manufacturing, featuring high indigenous content.

- The ship will enhance the Navy's capability to conduct low-intensity maritime operations and subsurface surveillance.

INS Anjadip?

- **Manufacturer:** Built by **Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE)**, Kolkata, in collaboration with **L&T Shipbuilding**.
- **Dimensions & Speed:**
 - The ship has a displacement of approximately **775 tonnes**.
 - It features a length of **77 metres** and can achieve speeds up to **25 knots**.
 - It has an endurance of **1,800 nautical miles**.
- **Primary Armament:**
 - Equipped with indigenously developed **lightweight torpedoes, ASW rockets, and mines**.
 - Features advanced **Hull Mounted Sonar** and **Low-Frequency Variable Depth Sonar (LFVDS)** for tracking silent underwater threats.
- **Role:** Specifically engineered for **Anti-Submarine Warfare** in shallow waters, mine laying, and providing security to coastal assets.

ASW SWC Project?

- **Overview:** A contract for **eight ASW SWC ships** was signed between the **Ministry of Defence (MoD)** and **GRSE** to replace the aging **Abhay-class ASW ships**.
- **Strategic Need:** Coastal waters are increasingly vulnerable to small, quiet conventional submarines; these crafts provide a dedicated platform to counter such threats where larger destroyers are less effective.
- **Indigenous Boost:** The project boasts over **80% indigenous content**, involving a large number of Indian **MSMEs** in the supply chain.

Additional Info

- **Historical Significance of the Name:**
 - Named after the island of **Anjadip** (located off Karwar, Karnataka).
 - The island played a pivotal role during **Operation Vijay** in 1961, which led to the liberation of **Goa, Daman, and Diu** from Portuguese rule.
- **Class Namesake:** The ships in this class are named after strategically important islands or historical sites along the Indian coastline (e.g., **INS Arnala, INS Androth**).
- **Current Status:**
 - The first ship, **INS Arnala**, and the second, **INS Androth**, preceded this commissioning.
 - This project is concurrent with another 8-ship ASW SWC project being executed by **Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL)**.

DRDO Successfully Conducts Flight Trials of Indigenous VSHORADS Missile System

What's the News?

- The **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** successfully conducted three successive flight trials of the **Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)**.
- The tests were carried out from a ground-based portable launcher at the **Integrated Test Range (ITR)**, Chandipur, off the coast of Odisha.
- The trials targeted high-speed **unmanned aerial targets**, demonstrating the system's ability to intercept and destroy low-altitude aerial threats at various ranges.

VSHORADS: Indigenous Air Defence Capability System Overview

- **Type:** **Man Portable Air Defence System (MANPADS)** — shoulder-fired, lightweight.
- **Developer:** **Research Centre Imarat (RCI)**, Hyderabad, in collaboration with other DRDO laboratories and industry partners.
- **Range:** Up to **6 km**
- **Altitude coverage:** Up to **3.5 km**
- **Configuration:** Designed for tri-service deployment (**Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force**).

Capabilities

- Neutralizes **low-altitude, short-range aerial threats** including:
 - **Drones and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)**
 - **Helicopters**
 - **Enemy aircraft** at close range
- **Dual-thrust rocket motor** for extended range
- **Miniaturized avionics** and advanced guidance systems
- **Lock-on-before-launch** capability for precision targeting

Test Validation & Data

Flight Trial Parameters

- **Location:** Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha.
- **Configuration:** Final deployment mode with field operators.
- **Target scenarios:** High-speed aerial threats at varying speeds, ranges, and altitudes.
- **Success rate:** 100% (all three consecutive trials successful).

Validation Systems

- **Telemetry systems:** Real-time flight data capture.
- **Electro-Optical Tracking System (EOTS):** Visual trajectory monitoring.
- **Radar systems:** Target tracking and engagement confirmation.

Related Defence Systems

- **Akash Missile System:** Medium-range surface-to-air missile (indigenous).
- **QRSAM (Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile):** Short-range air defence for Army.
- **MR-SAM (Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile):** Joint development with Israel.

- **IGLA-S:** Existing imported MANPADS system being supplemented/replaced.

Classification of Air Defence:

- **VSHORADS:** Range typically up to **6 km**.
- **Short Range (SRSAM):** Range between **15–30 km** (e.g., **Akash**).
- **Medium Range (MRSAM):** Range up to **70 km** (e.g., **Barak-8**).
- **Long Range (LRSAM):** Range exceeding **100 km**.



International Relations

India and US Finalize Landmark Trade Deal to Settle Tariff Disputes

What's the News?

- India and the **United States** have finalized a breakthrough trade agreement, significantly reducing trade barriers between the world's largest and fifth-largest economies.
- Under the deal, the US has slashed the effective tariff on Indian goods to **18%**, down from a peak of **50%** (which included punitive duties).
- In a reciprocal move, India has agreed to reduce tariffs on several American industrial and agricultural goods to **zero**, while maintaining safeguards for its most sensitive sectors.

Key Outcomes: Tariffs and Market Access

- **US Tariff Reset:**
 - **Reciprocal Tariff:** Reduced from **25% to 18%** on Indian imports.
 - **Penalty Removal:** The **25% additional punitive duty**—imposed in August 2025 due to India's Russian oil purchases—has been completely withdrawn.
 - **Strategic Advantage:** At 18%, Indian exports now face lower tariffs compared to regional competitors like **Vietnam (20%), Bangladesh (20%), and China (30-35%)**.
- **India's Market Opening:**
 - **Industrial Goods:** India will reduce tariffs to **0%** for nearly 98-99% of US industrial products (down from an average of 13.5%).
 - **Zero-Duty Access:** Over **\$40 billion** worth of Indian goods, including 2,000 products under the **Potential Tariff Adjustments for Aligned Partners (PTAAP)**, will now enter the US duty-free.
- **Sensitive Sectors Protected:** India has successfully exempted **dairy, poultry**, and "sensitive" agricultural items (like genetically modified foods) from the zero-tariff ambit to protect rural livelihoods.

Energy Pivot and Purchase Commitments

- **The Russia-Oil Shift:** In a major diplomatic concession, India has agreed to halt or significantly reduce the purchase of **Russian crude oil**.
- **Diversification:** India will pivot its energy procurement toward the **United States** and potentially **Venezuela** to meet its growing energy demands.
- **\$500 Billion Target:** India has committed to a long-term goal of purchasing **\$500 billion** worth of US energy, technology, coal, and agricultural products over the next five years.
 - This includes over **\$100 billion** for aircraft and parts to support India's aviation boom.
 - It also covers high-tech components for **Data Centers, Global Capability Centres (GCCs), and Semiconductors**.

Significance for Indian Economy

- **Revival of MSMEs:** Labor-intensive sectors like **textiles, leather, gems and jewellery, and seafood**, which operate on thin margins, are expected to see an immediate boost in orders.
- **Pharma Sector:** The deal stabilizes access for the Indian pharmaceutical industry, which currently supplies nearly **40% of the US generic drug market**.
- **Investment Climate:** The removal of trade war uncertainty is expected to stabilize the **Indian Rupee** and encourage **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** into Indian manufacturing.
- **Geopolitical Alignment:** The deal reinforces the **India-US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)** and positions India as a primary alternative to China in global supply chains.

Additional Info

- **Institutional Framework:**
 - The deal deepens the **US-India COMPACT** (Catalyzing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology) launched in 2025.
 - It aligns with the **SHANTI Act (2025)**, which paves the way for US participation in India's civil nuclear energy sector.
- **Trade Context (FY25):**
 - Bilateral trade reached a record **\$132 billion**.
 - India maintained a trade surplus of **\$40.82 billion** with the US.
 - The US remains India's **single largest trading partner**, accounting for approximately 11% of India's total global trade.
- **Section 232 Tariffs:** Certain items like **steel and aluminum** will continue to attract additional tariffs under US domestic law (Section 232), as these are global and not country-specific.

India Joins BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies

What's the News?

- The **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** announced India's formal entry into the **BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies (BCIC)**.
- A **Trust Fund Agreement** was signed between **DPIIT** and the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)** to operationalize India's participation.
- The initiative aims to provide integrated support services to manufacturing companies and **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** across the **BRICS** nations.
- The primary focus of the center is to facilitate the adoption of **Industry 4.0** technologies and enhance industrial productivity through global collaboration.

BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies (BCIC)?

- **Multilateral Platform:** It serves as a "one-stop" networking and resource hub for manufacturing firms within the **BRICS** framework.
- **Core Objective:** To help industries transition into "**Factories of the Future**" by adopting digital innovation, smart manufacturing, and sustainable practices.
- **Partnership:** The center is supported by **UNIDO**, which provides technical expertise to bridge the productivity gap between emerging economies and developed nations.
- **Services:**
 - **Technology Transfer:** Facilitating the exchange of advanced digital tools like **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** and **Internet of Things (IoT)**.
 - **Market Intelligence:** Guiding manufacturers on international expansion and accessing cross-border industrial networks.
 - **Capacity Building:** Training the workforce in cutting-edge industrial skills and advanced manufacturing processes.

Significance for India

- **MSME Boost:** Enables Indian MSMEs to integrate into BRICS value chains and access new markets.
- **Industrial Modernisation:** Supports adoption of advanced manufacturing practices and productivity enhancement.
- **Strategic Alignment:** Contributes to **Make in India** and **Atmanirbhar Bharat** initiatives by fostering innovation and global competitiveness.

Additional Info

- **BRICS Expansion:**
 - Originally **BRIC** (Brazil, Russia, India, China) formed in 2006; became **BRICS** with South Africa (2010).
 - Expanded in 2024-25 to include **Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Indonesia**.
 - Represents over **40% of world's population** and acts as a counterweight to Western-led global institutions.
- **National Productivity Council (NPC):**
 - Autonomous body under DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
 - Established in 1958 to promote productivity culture in India.
- **UNIDO:**
 - United Nations agency promoting industrial development; headquartered in **Vienna, Austria**.
- **PartNIR (Partnership on New Industrial Revolution):**
 - BRICS initiative to promote cooperation in digitalisation, industrialisation, and innovation.
- **Constitutional & Policy Context:**
 - **DPIIT** functions under **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**; responsible for industrial policy, FDI promotion, and internal trade.
 - **MSME Sector:** Contributes approximately **30% to India's GDP** and employs over **110 million people**.

- **Article 38:** Directive Principle promoting welfare of people by securing social order (basis for MSME support policies).

India-China Bilateral Trade Hits Record \$155.6 Billion in 2025

What's the News?

- **Bilateral trade** between **India** and **China** reached an all-time high of **\$155.62 billion** in the calendar year 2025, marking a year-on-year growth of over **12%**.
- Chinese Ambassador to India, **Xu Feihong**, highlighted that the relationship has transitioned from a "reset" to a "**new level of improvement**" following the high-level meeting between Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** and President **Xi Jinping** in **Tianjin** last August.
- While trade volumes surged, the **trade deficit** remains a significant concern for India, touching a record high of **\$116.12 billion**, up from \$99.21 billion in the previous year.

Trade Metrics (2025)

- **Total Bilateral Trade:** **\$155.62 billion** (Record high).
- **India's Exports to China:** **\$19.75 billion**, registering a **9.7% growth**. Key items include iron ore, marine products, spices, and telecom instruments.
- **Chinese Exports to India:** **\$135.87 billion**, showing a **12.8% increase**. This is driven primarily by industrial inputs and capital goods.
- **Trade Deficit:** **\$116.12 billion**, which is India's largest deficit with any single trading partner.

Trade Composition & Sectoral Dependency

- **India's Imports from China:**
 - Concentrated heavily in **Electronics** (\$38 billion), including mobile components, integrated circuits, and laptops.
 - **Machinery and Capital Goods:** Crucial for India's power and industrial sectors, including transformers and industrial machinery.
 - **Chemicals & Plastics:** Over **97%** of some antibiotics (like erythromycin) and **96%** of silicon wafers are sourced from China.
 - **Green Energy:** Critical reliance on Chinese **solar cells** (82.7%) and **lithium-ion batteries** (75.2%).
- **India's Exports to China:**
 - Primarily raw materials and low-value-added goods like **iron ore, naphtha, cotton, and seafood**.
 - Modest gains were recorded in **agricultural products** and **processed minerals**, though market access for Indian **IT** and **pharmaceutical** services remains a point of negotiation.

Strategic and Diplomatic Context

- **Diplomatic Normalization:** The trade surge coincides with the restoration of direct flights, resumed pilgrimages to the **Xizang** (Tibet) region, and the gradual easing of visa restrictions.

- **Global Cooperation:** China expressed support for India's **BRICS rotating presidency** and emphasized coordination within the **Global South** framework.
- **Philosophical Alignment:** The Chinese envoy drew parallels between India's "**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**" and China's vision of a "**world of great harmony**," as well as linking India's **Atmanirbhar Bharat** with China's self-reliance strategies.

Additional Info

- **Trade Deficit History:**
 - The deficit has expanded significantly from **\$1.1 billion in 2003-04** to over **\$116 billion in 2025**.
 - It accounts for nearly **35-40%** of India's total global trade imbalance.
- **Government Countermeasures:**
 - **Production Linked Incentive (PLI):** Schemes for 14 sectors aim to build domestic capacity in electronics and APIs to reduce Chinese dependency.
 - **Anti-Dumping Duties:** The **Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)** frequently imposes duties on Chinese chemicals and steel to protect domestic MSMEs.

India-Malaysia Strengthen Ties with IMPACT Framework and 11 Key Agreements

What's the News?

- Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** visited **Malaysia** for a bilateral summit, reaffirming the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)** established in August 2024.
- The visit marked the operationalisation of the **IMPACT framework** (India-Malaysia Partnership for Advancing Collective Transformation) aimed at deepening cooperation in **economic growth, digital integration, cultural ties, and people-centric development**.
- Both nations exchanged **11 bilateral agreements** covering **semiconductors, digital payments, security, disaster management, and vocational training**.

IMPACT Framework?

- **Vision:** To accelerate the **pace and scale** of bilateral cooperation, deliver **tangible benefits** for citizens, and position India-Malaysia ties as a driver of **Asia's collective growth**.
- **Core Pillars:**
 - **Economic & Technology Cooperation:** Over **100 Indian IT companies** operate in Malaysia, generating employment and strengthening digital ecosystems.
 - **Digital Connectivity:** Launch of **UPI in Malaysia** through collaboration between **NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL)** and **Malaysia's PayNet**, enabling seamless QR-based cross-border payments.
 - **People-to-People Linkages:** Strong **Indian-origin community** (second-largest globally,

~2.9 million people); expansion of **OCI eligibility up to 6th generation**; **Thiruvalluvar Scholarships** for Malaysian nationals.

- **Civilisational Bonds:** Shared maritime heritage, Tamil-Malay linguistic links, and historical connections including **INA legacy**.

Agreements Signed

- **Semiconductor Cooperation:** Joint research, workforce development, and technology transfer combining Malaysia's **13-15% global back-end semiconductor value chain** expertise with India's design capabilities.
- **Digital Payment Integration:** **UPI-DuitNow linkage** for low-cost remittances and tourism payments.
- **Local Currency Settlement:** **RBI** and **Bank Negara Malaysia** facilitating trade in **INR-MYR** to reduce dollar dependency.
- **Security Cooperation:** MoU between **CBI** and **Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission**; Exchange of Notes between National Security Councils on counter-terrorism, cybercrime, and maritime piracy.
- **Vocational Education (TVET):** Standardising training certifications and skilled worker mobility for semiconductor and digital sectors.
- **Disaster Management & UN Peacekeeping:** Enhanced cooperation in humanitarian assistance and global peace operations.

Additional Info

- **Act East Policy:** Malaysia is a cornerstone of India's **Act East Policy** and a vital partner in the **ASEAN** region, situated strategically along the **Strait of Malacca**.
- **BRICS & Global South:**
 - India expressed support for Malaysia's bid for full membership in **BRICS**.
 - Malaysia welcomed India's **2026 BRICS Chairmanship**.
- **Diaspora - The Living Bridge:**
 - Malaysia hosts the second-largest **Indian-origin community** globally, numbering nearly **2.9 million**.
 - To deepen this link, India announced the opening of a new **Consulate in Sabah** (Borneo Island).
- **Environment:** India invited Malaysia to join the **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)** and the **Global Biofuel Alliance**.
- **Bilateral Trade Profile:**
 - India is Malaysia's third-largest trading partner in ASEAN.
 - Major Indian exports: Petroleum products, meat, aluminum, and machinery.
 - Major Indian imports: **Palm oil**, electronics, and crude oil.

India, Canada Agree on Security Work Plan

What's the News?

- **National Security Adviser Ajit Doval** conducted a **two-day visit to Ottawa** (February 6-7, 2026), meeting his Canadian counterpart **Nathalie Drouin** and Public

Safety Minister **Gary Anandasangaree** to reset strained bilateral ties.

- Both sides agreed to a **"shared work plan"** for cooperation on **national security, law enforcement, and cybersecurity**, including establishment of **security liaison officers** in each country for streamlined information sharing.
- The visit; the **first bilateral NSA-level engagement since the 2023 diplomatic crisis** over the killing of Khalistani separatist **Hardeep Singh Nijjar** signals a thaw ahead of Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney's** expected visit to India in March 2026.
- Key focus areas include **countering fentanyl trafficking, transnational organized crime, cybersecurity threats**, and addressing **Khalistani extremist activities** on Canadian soil.

Shared Work Plan: Key Components

Security and Law Enforcement Cooperation

- **Liaison Officer Mechanism:** Each country to establish dedicated **security and law-enforcement liaison officers** to facilitate real-time intelligence sharing and operational coordination.
- **Priority Areas:**
 - **Illegal drug flows:** Particularly **fentanyl precursors**- a critical concern for Canada amid North America's opioid crisis.
 - **Transnational organized criminal networks:** Human trafficking, financial crimes, and cross-border smuggling operations.
 - **Fraud and immigration enforcement:** Joint efforts against document fraud and illegal migration networks.

Cybersecurity Collaboration

- **Formalized cooperation framework** on **cybersecurity policy** and **information sharing** on cyber threats.
- Focus on **critical infrastructure protection** and **countering state-sponsored cyber intrusions**.
- Alignment with domestic laws and international obligations under **UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE)** norms.

Counter-Terrorism and Extremism

- **Khalistani networks:** Doval strongly conveyed that **violent extremist groups should not enjoy any form of support** from Canadian state or non-state actors.
- **Shift in Canadian stance:** Canadian authorities reportedly accepted that **Khalistani extremism directed at India constitutes organized crime**, not protected free speech marking a significant policy evolution from previous administrations.

Diplomatic Context: From Crisis to Normalization

The 2023–2024 Diplomatic Rupture

Event	Date	Impact
Hardeep Singh Nijjar killing	June 2023	Khalistani separatist shot in Vancouver; India designated him terrorist in 2020

Event	Date	Impact
Trudeau's Parliament statement	September 18, 2023	Alleged "potential link" between Indian agents and killing; triggered crisis
Mutual diplomat expulsions	September–October 2023	Tit-for-tat withdrawals; India suspended visa services for Canadians
October 2024 escalation	October 2024	Canada expelled Indian High Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Verma + 5 diplomats; India retaliated with 6 expulsions
G7 Summit thaw	June 2025	PM Modi met PM Carney at Kananaskis G7 ; agreed to re-engage

Path to Normalization

- **Mark Carney's premiership** (April 2025): **Liberal Party leader** replaced **Justin Trudeau**, enabling diplomatic reset.
- **Twin-track approach:** Canada pursuing **active law enforcement dialogue** alongside expanded **trade, technology, and energy cooperation**.
- **High Commissioner reappointment:** Both countries have restored **ambassadorial-level representation** in respective capitals.

Additional Info

Legal Instruments and Mechanisms

Agreement/Mechanism	Year	Purpose
Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT)	1994 (operationalized 1998)	Legal cooperation in criminal matters
Canada-India Strategic Dialogue	1997	Annual high-level political consultations
Canada-India Working Group on Counter-Terrorism	1997	Operational counter-terror cooperation
Extradition Treaty	1987	Surrender of fugitive offenders (rarely used for Khalistani cases)

Khalistani Extremism: Historical Context

- **Air India Kanishka bombing (1985): 329 fatalities** - worst aviation terror attack until 9/11; perpetrated by Canada-based Khalistani militants; most accused **acquitted** in controversial trials.

- **Talwinder Singh Parmar (1982):** Canada rejected India's extradition request on **Commonwealth protocol technicalities** despite terrorism charges.
- **Designated terrorist entities:** **Babbar Khalsa International (BKI)** and **International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF)** listed by Canada in **2003**; **Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF)** and **Sikhs for Justice (SFJ)** subsequently designated.

India Bolsters Strategic Ties with France, UK, and Greece through Innovation, Mobility, and Defence Pacts

What's the News?

- India has significantly strengthened its bilateral engagements with three key European partners—**France**, the **United Kingdom**, and **Greece**.
- The developments include the designation of 2026 as a landmark year for technological collaboration with **France**, the signing of a long-awaited **Social Security Agreement (SSA)** with the **UK**, and a **Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI)** to expand defense industrial manufacturing with **Greece**.
- These moves aim to enhance economic mobility for the Indian workforce, foster high-tech innovation, and achieve self-reliance in defense production under the **"Make in India"** initiative.

India-France: 2026 Year of Innovation?

- **Overview:** India and **France** have officially designated **2026** as the **"India-France Year of Innovation"** to deepen cooperation in emerging technologies.
- **Key Focus Areas:**
 - **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Collaborative research and ethical AI governance, spearheaded by France's Special Envoy for AI.
 - **Digital Economy:** Integration of digital public infrastructure and deepening the **India-France Roadmap on Cyber-security and Digital Technology**.
 - **Sustainability:** Joint ventures in **Green Hydrogen**, clean energy transitions, and circular economy solutions.
- **Significance:** This initiative builds upon the **Horizon 2047** roadmap, marking 50 years of the strategic partnership and 100 years of India's independence.

India-UK: Social Security Agreement (SSA)?

- **Objective:** To eliminate "double social security contributions" for Indian professionals working in the **UK** and British nationals in India.
- **Key Details:**
 - **Exemption:** Indian workers on short-term contracts (detached workers) will no longer be required to pay social security taxes in both countries.
 - **Workforce Mobility:** The pact simplifies the movement of high-skilled professionals, particularly in the **IT and Tech sectors**.
 - **Economic Impact:** Major Indian firms like **TCS**, **Infosys**, and **Wipro** are expected to

save millions of pounds annually in compliance and contribution costs.

- **Significance:** This agreement fulfills a long-standing demand of the Indian government and serves as a precursor to the proposed **India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA)**.

India-Greece: Defence Industrial Cooperation?

- **Overview:** India and **Greece** signed a **Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI)** to strengthen defense industrial cooperation and military-to-military engagements.
- **Key Objectives:**
 - **Co-production:** Focus on the joint manufacturing of military hardware, including **UAVs (Drones)**, **Ammunition**, and **Naval systems**.
 - **Technology Transfer:** Collaboration between Indian defense startups and Greek technology firms to modernize military equipment.
 - **Strategic Ties:** Strengthening the **Mediterranean-India** link, enhancing maritime security and counter-terrorism efforts.
- **Context:** This follows the elevation of ties to a **"Strategic Partnership"** during the visit of the Greek Prime Minister to India.

Additional Info

- **Social Security Agreements (SSAs):**
 - India has signed SSAs with over **20 countries** (e.g., Germany, France, Japan) to protect the interests of cross-border workers.
 - They provide for **Detachment** (exemption from local social security), **Exportability** (receiving pension in the home country), and **Totalization** (combining service periods in both countries for pension eligibility).
- **Horizon 2047 Roadmap:**
 - A bilateral framework between India and France focusing on three pillars: **Partnership for Security and Sovereignty**, **Partnership for the Planet**, and **Partnership for the People**.
- **Defence Industrial Corridors:**
 - The India-Greece JDI aligns with India's goal of achieving a defense export target of **₹35,000 crore** by promoting indigenous manufacturing within the **Uttar Pradesh** and **Tamil Nadu** Defence Industrial Corridors.

India Hosts Inaugural UN Training Programme on Small Arms Control

What's the News

- The **Indian Army** hosted the inaugural **Asia-Pacific United Nations Fellowship Training Programme on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control** in **Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh**.
- The **three-week programme** is organised under the aegis of the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** and **Ministry of Defence (MoD)**.

- **Delegates from 13 Asia-Pacific nations** are participating to strengthen regional cooperation on arms control and disarmament.
- The training aims to enhance technical and policy capacity of government officials to prevent **illicit small arms trafficking**.

UN Fellowship Programme on SALW Control?

Overview

The fellowship is a **standing dedicated training programme** established by the **UN General Assembly** in **December 2022** (Resolution A/RES/77/71) to strengthen technical and practical expertise of government officials responsible for implementing global arms control frameworks.

Key Details

- **Organiser:** **United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)** through its **Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD)**.
- **Duration:** Three-week intensive training (conducted from mid-February to early March).
- **Regional Rotation:** The fellowship operates in four iterations covering all regions:
 - **Africa.**
 - **Asia and the Pacific** (currently hosted by India).
 - **Europe and Other States.**
 - **Latin America and the Caribbean.**
- **Annual Intake:** **60 government officials** globally (15 per regional iteration).
- **Selection:** Competitive evaluation process; each Member State can nominate up to three candidates but only one is selected per country.

Training Programme Overview

Aspect	Details
Venue	Military College of Materials Management (MCMM), Jabalpur
Duration	3 weeks (February 16 – March 6, 2026)
Participants	13 Asia-Pacific countries
Organisers	Indian Army, MEA, MoD, UNODA
Focus Area	SALW control, tracing systems, disarmament cooperation

Additional Info

- **UNODA (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs):**
 - Established in 1998 to promote nuclear disarmament and the regulation of conventional weapons.
 - It provides substantive support for norms-setting in the **UN General Assembly** and other international bodies.
- **Defining SALW:**
 - **Small Arms:** Weapons designed for individual use, such as revolvers, self-loading pistols, rifles, and sub-machine guns.
 - **Light Weapons:** Weapons designed for use by a crew of two or three, though some may be carried by an individual, such as heavy

machine guns, portable anti-aircraft missiles, and mortars of less than 100mm calibre.

- **UN Programme of Action (PoA):**
 - Adopted in 2001, it is the primary international framework for countries to prevent, combat, and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms in all its aspects.

Indian Passport Rises to 75th Rank in Henley Passport Index 2026

What's the News

- **India's passport** has climbed to **75th position** in the **Henley Passport Index 2026**, jumping **10 ranks** from its previous standing.
- Indian passport holders can now access **56 countries and territories** without requiring a prior visa.
- The improvement reflects enhanced **diplomatic engagements** and **visa waiver agreements** negotiated by the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)**.
- This marks one of the **significant gains** among Asian passports in the latest global ranking.

Henley Passport Index Overview

Aspect	Details
India's Rank (2026)	75th position
Previous Rank	85th position
Rank Improvement	+10 positions
Visa-Free Access	56 countries/territories
Index Publisher	Henley & Partners (UK-based)
Methodology	Based on IATA data and visa-free scoring

Features of the Index

- **Global Coverage:** Ranks **199 passports** across **227 travel destinations** worldwide.
- **Scoring System:** Based on number of destinations passport holders can access **without a prior visa**.
- **Data Source:** Uses exclusive data from **International Air Transport Association (IATA)**.
- **Update Frequency:** Rankings are updated **quarterly** to reflect visa policy changes.

Methodology

- **Data Source:** Exclusive data from **International Air Transport Association (IATA)** – the largest, most accurate travel information database.
- **Coverage:** **199 passports** evaluated against **227 travel destinations**.
- **Scoring System:**
 - **1 point** for each destination where no visa is required, or visa-on-arrival, visitor's permit, or basic eTA is available.
 - **0 points** for destinations requiring pre-approved visa or full e-visa with prior approval.

- **Ranking:** Comparative ranking based on total points; countries with identical scores share the same rank.

India's Performance Trajectory

- **2025:** Ranked **85th** with **57 visa-free destinations**.
- **January 2026:** Dropped to **80th** with **55 destinations** (after losing Iran and Bolivia).
- **February 2026:** Improved to **75th** with **56 destinations** (The Gambia added).

Global Passport Hierarchy?

Top Performers (2026)

- **1st: Singapore** – 192 destinations
- **2nd: Japan & South Korea** – 187 destinations
- **3rd: Sweden & UAE** – 186 destinations
- **4th:** France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland – 185 destinations
- **5th:** Austria, Greece, Malta, Portugal – 184 destinations
- **10th: United States** – 179 destinations

India's Neighbourhood Comparison

Country	Rank	Visa-Free Access
Maldives	49th	93 destinations
China	56th	82 destinations
India	75th	56 destinations
Bhutan	83rd	48 destinations
Myanmar	88th	43 destinations
Sri Lanka	91st	39 destinations
Bangladesh	93rd	37 destinations
Nepal	95th	35 destinations
Pakistan	97th	32 destinations
Afghanistan	101st	24 destinations

ISA Launches Global AI-for-Energy Mission to Accelerate Clean Power Across 120+ Countries

What's the News?

- The **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** launched the **Global Mission on AI for Energy** at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026** to fast-track AI-enabled clean energy solutions across **120+ member countries**.
- The mission aims to integrate **Artificial Intelligence** with digital public infrastructure showcasing **India's Energy Stack** to modernize grids, scale decentralised renewables, and improve citizen-centric energy services.
- Key partners include India's **Ministry of Power, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**, and **REC Limited**.

AI-for-Energy Mission?

- **Overview:** A strategic international initiative to integrate **AI** into clean energy infrastructure of developing and emerging economies, enabling **digital leapfrogging** without legacy system constraints.
- **Core Objective:** Transform traditional power grids into **smart, bidirectional systems** capable of

absorbing high renewable energy penetration while ensuring **equitable and affordable electricity access**.

Key Focus Areas:

- **AI for distributed energy** systems.
- **Start-up innovation** and entrepreneurship.
- **Interoperable standards** across borders.
- **Citizen-centric benefits** and service delivery.
- **Sustainable financing** mechanisms.

India Energy Stack?

- **Concept:** An **interoperable digital public infrastructure** model (similar to **UPI** for payments) connecting **consumers, vendors, utilities, and financial institutions** on a unified platform.
- **Key Components Showcased:**
 - **One Solar App:** Digital interface for rooftop solar registration, **net-metering transparency**, and performance monitoring (developed by **BSES Rajdhani Power Limited**).
 - **Digital Twin Technology:** Virtual replicas of distribution networks (**DISCOMs**) enabling **real-time simulation, predictive maintenance**, and outage management.
 - **GIS-based Mapping:** Geospatial tools by **Andhra Pradesh Eastern Power Distribution Company Limited** for asset-level visibility and optimized infrastructure planning.
- **Impact:** Created **trust, speed, and scale** in rooftop solar deployment, transforming pilot projects into scalable national programs.

India's Clean Energy Context?

- **Installed Capacity:** Nearly **520 GW** total capacity with **over 52%** from **non-fossil sources**.
- **Growth Driver:** Technology integration (not just policy intent) credited for rapid rooftop solar expansion.
- **Future Vision:** AI as the **backbone** for smarter, resilient, and participative energy ecosystems.

International Solar Alliance (ISA):

- **Founded:** **2015** by India and France at **COP21 in Paris**
- **Membership:** **120+ countries** across Africa, Asia, and island nations.
- **Four Strategic Pillars:**
 - **Catalytic Finance Hub:** Mobilizing investments at scale.
 - **Global Capability Centre and Digitisation:** Innovation and capacity building.
 - **Regional and Country-level Engagement:** Tailored interventions.
 - **Technology Roadmap and Policy:** Accelerating emerging solar technologies.

India-UK Launch Offshore Wind Taskforce Under Vision 2035 Framework

What's the News?

India and the United Kingdom launched the **India-UK Offshore Wind Taskforce** under the **Fourth India-UK Energy Dialogue** and **Vision 2035**. Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy **Pralhad Joshi** and UK Deputy Prime Minister **David Lammy** inaugurated the platform aimed at accelerating strategic clean energy cooperation through

time-bound, execution-focused collaboration. The taskforce seeks to develop India's nascent offshore wind ecosystem by leveraging UK expertise and Indian market scale.

India-UK Offshore Wind Taskforce?

- **Nature:** Bilateral cooperation platform and **strategic leadership body** for India's offshore wind sector.
- **Constituted Under:** **Vision 2035** and **Fourth India-UK Energy Dialogue**.
- **Key Stakeholders:** Policymakers, industry leaders, technical experts from both nations.
- **Core Philosophy:** Described by Minister Joshi as a "**Trustforce**"; moving beyond symbolism to deliver measurable milestones and convert global lessons into India-tailored solutions.

Three Priority Pillars?

- **Ecosystem Planning & Market Design:**
 - Refining **seabed leasing frameworks**.
 - Aligning bidding trajectories with **grid readiness**.
 - Establishing **credible revenue-certainty mechanisms**.
- **Infrastructure & Supply Chains:**
 - **Port modernization** and marine logistics.
 - **Local manufacturing** of foundations, towers, blades, and cables.
 - **Specialized vessels** and skilling for marine operations.
- **Financing & Risk Mitigation:**
 - **Blended finance structures**.
 - **Early-stage de-risking instruments**.
 - Mobilization of **long-term institutional capital**.

India's Offshore Wind Context?

- **Potential:** Estimated **70 GW** offshore wind generation capacity.
- **Identified Zones:** Initial development planned off **Gujarat** and **Tamil Nadu** coasts.
- **Grid Infrastructure:** Transmission planning completed for initial **10 GW offshore evacuation capacity** (5 GW each off Gujarat and Tamil Nadu).
- **Financial Support:** **Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme** of **₹7,453 crore** (approx. £710 million) approved to support early projects.
- **Strategic Linkage:** Offshore wind to supply high-quality renewable power to **coastal industrial clusters** and **green hydrogen hubs** under the **National Green Hydrogen Mission**.

India's Clean Energy Progress?

- **Non-Fossil Fuel Capacity:** Crossed **272 GW** (exceeding 50% of total installed capacity **five years ahead** of NDC commitment).
 - **Solar:** Over **141 GW**.
 - **Wind:** **55 GW**.
- **Current Financial Year Additions:**
 - **Solar:** More than **35 GW** added.
 - **Wind:** **4.61 GW** added.
- **Rooftop Solar:** Nearly **3 million households** benefited under **PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (MSGMBY)** in less than two years.
- **Solarized Pumps:** **2.1 million pumps** under **PM-KUSUM** scheme.

- **Green Hydrogen Prices:** Fallen to historic low of **₹279 per kg**; green ammonia at **₹49.75 per kg**.
- **Targets:** **500 GW renewable energy by 2030**; **net-zero by 2070**.

UK Expertise Contribution?

- **Global Position:** UK is the **second-largest market for offshore wind** worldwide.
- **Recent Achievement:** Held **Europe's biggest auction** securing **8.4 GW** of new capacity.
- **Value Proposition:** Demonstrated leadership in scaling from early-stage deployment to large commercial markets with **mature supply chains**.
- **Complementary Strengths:** UK brings experience; India brings **scale, long-term demand, and rapidly expanding clean energy ecosystem**.

India Assumes Chairmanship of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) After 16 Years

What's the News?

The **9th Conclave of Chiefs of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)** convened in **Visakhapatnam**, bringing together Chiefs of Navies and Heads of Maritime Security Agencies from **33 countries**. **India** assumed the **Chairmanship of IONS** from the Royal Thai Navy, marking its return to the helm after **16 years** (having held the inaugural chairmanship from 2008–2010). Admiral **Dinesh K. Tripathi**, Chief of the Naval Staff, now serves as Chair of IONS.

IONS: Institutional Framework

Genesis & Mandate

- **Established:** 2008 (initiated by Indian Navy)
- **Nature:** Voluntary, inclusive, multilateral maritime forum
- **Objective:** Enhance cooperation among navies of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littoral states; maintain peace, stability, and secure sea lanes
- **Membership:** **25 member navies** and **9 observer nations** (participation spans Atlantic to Pacific)

Chairmanship Rotation

- Two-year term rotating among member countries
- Each cycle includes one **Conclave of Chiefs** and one **Preparatory Workshop**
- **Previous Chairs:** UAE, South Africa, Australia, Bangladesh, Iran, France, Thailand (after India's inaugural term)

Developments at 9th Conclave

New Membership & Engagements

- **Philippines** included as new **Observer**
- **Oman** joined the **Working Group on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**

Digital Infrastructure

- Launch of **upgraded IONS website** by Indian Navy to enhance usability, institutional continuity, and secure engagement among member navies

India's Chairmanship Priorities

- **IONS Maritime Exercise (IMEX):** Conduct of joint naval exercises

- **IOS SAGAR Deployments:** Continued deployment to IONS member countries with participation of personnel from IONS navies onboard
- **Maritime Information Sharing Workshops:** Structured dialogues for operational interaction and capability enhancement
- **Strengthening Working Groups:**
 - **Maritime Security (MARSEC):** Countering piracy, terrorism, trafficking
 - **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR):** Coordination mechanisms for natural disasters and humanitarian crises
 - **Information Sharing & Interoperability (IS&I):** Real-time data exchange and compatible operational procedures

Additional Info

Working Groups Structure

- **HADR Working Group:** Develops rapid response protocols for natural disasters; Oman recently joined
- **MARSEC Working Group:** Focuses on piracy, terrorism, and maritime law enforcement
- **IS&I Working Group:** Standardizes procedures for joint operations and real-time intelligence sharing

Related Maritime Initiatives

- **SAGAR:** India's vision for maritime cooperation in IOR
- **Milan Exercise:** Multilateral naval exercise hosted by India
- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):** Complementary economic and political forum

India Joins US-Led Pax Silica Initiative to Secure AI and Critical Minerals Supply Chains

What's the News?

India formally joined the **Pax Silica** initiative by signing a declaration at the **India AI Impact Summit 2026** in New Delhi. Union Minister for Electronics & IT **Ashwini Vaishnaw** and US Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs **Jacob Helberg** signed the pact, marking India's entry into the strategic alliance aimed at building resilient supply chains for **artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and critical minerals.**

Pax Silica: Overview

Genesis & Nomenclature

- **Launched:** December 2025 at inaugural summit in Washington D.C.
- **Terminology:** "Pax" (Latin for peace) signifies stability through secure technology; "Silica" refers to the mineral foundation of computer chips and AI systems
- **Strategic Shift:** Represents transition from 20th-century oil/steel economy to 21st-century silicon and critical minerals-based economy

Core Objectives

- Create **secure, resilient, and diversified** global supply chains for critical minerals, semiconductors, and AI technologies
- Counter **supply chain concentration risks** and reduce dependence on single-country dominance (particularly

China, which controls major share of rare-earth processing)

- Build **trusted innovation ecosystems** among like-minded nations
- Prevent supply disruptions and "weaponization" of critical minerals witnessed in automobile industry during geopolitical crises

Membership Structure

Signatory Nations

- **Original members:** Australia, Greece, Israel, Japan, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Singapore, UAE, United Kingdom
- **New entrant:** India

Non-Signatory Participants

- Canada, European Union, Netherlands, OECD, Taiwan

India and GCC Launch Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations

What's the News?

- **India** and the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** have signed a joint statement to formally resume negotiations for a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA).**
- The agreement was formalized during a meeting between India's **Union Minister of Commerce and Industry** and the **GCC Secretary-General.**
- This move aims to significantly boost bilateral trade and investment, building on the momentum of existing individual trade pacts like the **India-UAE CEPA.**

The India-GCC FTA Framework

- **Objective:** To eliminate or reduce customs duties on a broad range of goods and simplify procedures for trade in services and investments.
- **Key Sectors:** Negotiations will focus on sectors including **chemicals, petrochemicals, energy, agriculture, textiles, and gems and jewellery.**
- **Strategic Energy Partnership:** The GCC is a primary source of India's energy imports; the FTA aims to create a more stable and cost-effective energy supply chain.
- **Investment Flow:** The pact is expected to attract sovereign wealth funds from the Gulf into India's **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)** and other infrastructure projects.

Current Trade Dynamics & Significance

- **Trade Volume:** The GCC is India's largest regional trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding **\$160 billion** in the last fiscal year.
- **Import Dependency:** India imports roughly **35% of its oil** and **70% of its gas** requirements from the GCC member states.
- **Remittances:** The region is home to over **8.5 million** Indian expatriates who contribute significantly to India's foreign exchange reserves through remittances.
- **Member Nations:** The GCC consists of six countries: **Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain.**

Additional Info

Existing Bilateral FTAs with GCC Members

- **India-UAE CEPA:** Signed **2022**, operational **2022** (first comprehensive FTA with a GCC nation)
- **India-Saudi Arabia:** Strategic Partnership Council established, FTA under discussion
- **India-Oman:** Existing FTA (2006) under review for upgrade

India's FTA Strategy

- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs):** Preferring broader agreements over traditional FTAs
- **Key Partners:** UAE, Australia, UK (under negotiation), EU (under negotiation), EFTA
- **Focus Areas:** Services mobility, digital trade, labor rights, sustainable development

Challenges in India-GCC FTA

- **Trade Deficit:** India's concern over oil import dependency
- **Labor Mobility:** Negotiations on professional visas and worker protections
- **Rules of Origin:** Preventing Chinese goods from routing through GCC
- **Services Access:** GCC restrictions on foreign professionals
- **Geopolitical Tensions:** Iran-GCC rivalries affecting Indian interests

Related Initiatives

- **IMEC:** India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (announced **G20 2023**)
- **I2U2:** Quadilateral focusing on infrastructure, energy, food security, and technology
- **Arabian Sea Connectivity:** Port development (Haifa, Chabahar, Duqm) linking India to GCC

India and France Amend Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC)

What's the News?

- **India and France** have signed an amending protocol to update the existing **Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC)**.
- The update aims to align the bilateral tax treaty with the **Minimum Standards** of the **OECD/G20 Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)** project.
- A major highlight of this amendment is the formal removal of the **Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** clause from the treaty, providing greater tax certainty for cross-border transactions.

Key Amendments in the Protocol

- **Removal of MFN Clause:** The protocol deletes the **MFN clause** specifically concerning dividends, interest, royalties, and fees for technical services. This ensures that tax rates are governed strictly by the India-France treaty and are not automatically lowered based on India's agreements with other countries.
- **Anti-Abuse Provisions:** It introduces the **Principal Purpose Test (PPT)**, which allows tax authorities to deny treaty benefits if the primary objective of a

transaction or arrangement was to obtain tax advantages.

- **Preamble Update:** The new preamble explicitly states that the convention is intended to eliminate double taxation without creating opportunities for **non-taxation** or reduced taxation through tax evasion or avoidance, including **treaty shopping**.
- **Global Standards:** These changes bring the India-France tax relationship in line with the **Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures (MLI)**.

Why Remove the MFN Clause?

- **India's Position:** The MFN clause created **interpretational disputes** and **litigation** (e.g., **Netherlands, Switzerland cases**)
- **Supreme Court Rulings:** Indian courts ruled that MFN benefits apply automatically only if the third country was an OECD member when the treaty was signed
- **Revenue Protection:** Removal prevents automatic reduction of withholding tax rates (currently **10%** on dividends, interest, royalties) without renegotiation
- **Policy Shift:** India moving toward **country-specific negotiations** rather than automatic parity

BEPS Compliance Framework

- **BEPS Action 6:** Preventing treaty abuse through **PPT** and **LOB**
- **BEPS Action 14:** Making dispute resolution mechanisms more effective
- **BEPS Action 15:** Developing a **Multilateral Instrument (MLI)** to modify existing treaties
- **India's MLI Position:** Signed **2017**, covers **93 treaties**; France is a covered tax agreement

India-France Economic Ties

Indicator	Value
Bilateral Trade	~\$13 billion (2024)
French FDI in India	\$10+ billion (2000-2024)
Indian Investments in France	€1+ billion
Key Sectors	Defense, aerospace, nuclear energy, infrastructure, IT
Strategic Partnership	25+ years (established 1998)

Additional Info

DTAC Basics

- **Purpose:** Prevent double taxation of same income in two countries; promote cross-border trade and investment
- **Methods:**
 - **Exemption Method:** Income taxed only in residence country
 - **Credit Method:** Tax paid in source country credited against residence country liability
- **India's Network:** **90+ DTACs** with various countries

Recent DTAC Amendments by India

- **Mauritius: 2016** – Introduced source-based taxation on capital gains; **2021** – Further amendments
- **Singapore: 2016** – Similar to Mauritius protocol
- **Cyprus: 2016** – Removed from blacklist after DTAC amendment
- **Netherlands: 2023** – MFN clause interpretation disputes ongoing
- **Switzerland: 2023** – Supreme Court ruling on MFN applicability

BEPS Project Overview

- **Launched: 2013** by OECD/G20
- **Objective:** Prevent tax avoidance by multinational enterprises exploiting gaps in tax rules
- **15 Actions:** Covering digital economy, hybrid mismatches, treaty abuse, transfer pricing, etc.
- **India's Implementation:**
 - **Equalization Levy (2016, 2020)** on digital services
 - **Significant Economic Presence (SEP)** concept introduced
 - **Vivad se Vishwas** scheme for dispute resolution

Principal Purpose Test (PPT)

- **Standard Clause:** "Notwithstanding any other provision of this Convention, a benefit under this Convention shall not be granted in respect of an item of income if it is reasonable to conclude, having regard to all relevant facts and circumstances, that obtaining that benefit was one of the principal purposes of any arrangement or transaction"
- **Objective:** Prevents artificial structuring solely to obtain treaty benefits

India-Germany Launch €20 Million Climate Resilience Initiative

What's the News?

- **India and Germany** have launched a new **€20 million Large Grant project** under the **International Climate Initiative (IKI)** to strengthen climate resilience.
- The initiative focuses on **high-risk ecosystems** including the **Himalayas, Western Ghats,** and other vulnerable regions across India.
- The project aims to support India's **National Adaptation Plan (NAP)** and enhance ecosystem-based adaptation strategies.
- This partnership reaffirms bilateral commitment to **climate adaptation and resilience** during high-level Climate Talks held in New Delhi.
- The funding will be implemented through **GIZ (German Corporation for International Cooperation)** in collaboration with Indian ministries.

International Climate Initiative (IKI) Overview

- **Established: 2008** by the **German Federal Government.**
- **Purpose:** Key financial instrument supporting **international climate action and biodiversity** in developing and emerging economies.
- **Funding Structure:**

- **Large Grants:** €5–20 million per project for large-scale interventions.
- **Medium Grants:** €300,000–800,000 for 36-month projects.
- **Small Grants:** For local and regional climate initiatives.

- **Global Reach:** Over **1,000 projects** with current funding volume of approximately **€7.5 billion.**
- **India's Status:** One of the **priority partner countries** since IKI's inception.

India-Germany Climate Partnership

- **Bilateral Cooperation:** Started in **2008** under IKI framework.
- **Current Portfolio:** **27 IKI-supported projects** actively working in India on emissions reduction and climate resilience.
- **Total Climate Finance:** German climate finance commitment to India reached **€11.8 billion.**
- **Focus Areas:**
 - **Climate mitigation** (emissions reduction).
 - **Climate adaptation** (resilience building).
 - **Biodiversity conservation.**
- **Implementation Agency:** **GIZ** facilitates dialogue between Indian and German ministries.

Project Objectives & Target Regions

- **Primary Goal:** Improve resilience in **vulnerable ecosystems** across priority regions.
- **Target Ecosystems:**
 - **Himalayan Region:** Glacial melt, water security, mountain communities.
 - **Western Ghats:** Biodiversity hotspots, monsoon-dependent agriculture.
 - **Coastal Zones:** Sea-level rise, cyclone vulnerability.
- **Key Activities:**
 - Ecosystem-based adaptation strategies.
 - Community-level climate resilience building.
 - Integration with **National Adaptation Plan (NAP)** framework.
- **Duration:** Multi-year intervention with high-impact potential.

India and Israel Elevate Ties to "Special Strategic Partnership"; FTA Negotiations Progress

What's the News?

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** undertook a **State Visit to Israel** (February 25-26, 2026) at the invitation of Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu**. The visit culminated in the elevation of bilateral relations to a "**Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity**" and the signing of **16 agreements/MoUs** spanning defence, technology, agriculture, and cybersecurity. Both leaders also welcomed the conclusion of the **first round of FTA negotiations** in New Delhi, with the next round scheduled for **May 2026 in Israel.**

Special Strategic Partnership?

Overview: The elevation represents a qualitative upgrade from the existing Strategic Partnership (established 2017),

institutionalising cooperation across **Government-to-Government, Business-to-Business, and People-to-People** domains.

Pillars:

- **Peace:** Cooperation on regional stability, counter-terrorism, and Gaza peace initiatives
- **Innovation:** Integration of capabilities in **AI, semiconductors, quantum computing, biotechnology, and space**
- **Prosperity:** Enhanced trade, investment facilitation, and connectivity through **IMEC and I2U2 frameworks**

Strategic Context:

- Complementary strengths: Israel as a **global innovation hub**; India as a **talent and manufacturing powerhouse**
- Alignment with India's '**Atmanirbhar Bharat**' and '**Viksit Bharat 2047**' visions
- Support for **US President Trump's "Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict"**

FTA & Economic Cooperation?

Free Trade Agreement Progress:

- **First negotiating round:** Concluded in New Delhi (4-day talks covering goods, services, rules of origin, digital trade)
- **Next round:** Scheduled for **May 2026 in Israel**
- **Chief Negotiators:** Ajay Bhadoo (India) and Yifat Alon Perel (Israel)
- **Scope:** Market access, investment facilitation, customs simplification, technology transfer

Bilateral Investment Treaty:

- Signed in **September 2025** by Finance Ministers
- Provides **transparency, predictability, and independent dispute resolution**

Financial Integration:

- **UPI-MASAV linkage:** MoU between **NPCI International** and Israel's payment system for cross-border transactions
- **Financial-Cyber Partnership:** Exchange of intelligence and joint simulations through **Financial CSIRTs**
- **India-Israel Financial Dialogue:** Launched to boost monetary cooperation

Trade Potential:

- Current bilateral trade: Approximately **\$10-12 billion** (2024 estimates)
- Target sectors: **Machinery, chemicals, textiles, agriculture, medical devices, advanced technologies**

Defence & Security Cooperation?

Recent Developments:

- **MoU on Defence Cooperation** signed (November 2025)
- Reported **\$10 billion multi-year defence deal** under discussion focusing on:
 - **Air-defence systems**
 - **Surveillance and battlefield technologies**
 - **AI and quantum computing applications**

Strategic Cooperation:

- **I2U2 Partnership:** India-Israel-UAE-US quadrilateral for regional projects
- **IMEC:** India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor for connectivity

- **Counter-terrorism:** Joint condemnation of **October 7, 2023 attack on Israel** and **Pahalgam attack (April 2025)** on Indian tourists

Data Point:

- India purchased roughly **one-third of Israel's weapons exports** (~\$20.5 billion between 2020-2024), making it Israel's **largest defence customer**

Technology & Innovation?

Critical and Emerging Technologies (CET):

- **NSA-led initiative** on CET cooperation (semiconductors, AI, quantum)
- **India-Israel Industrial R&D and Innovation Fund (I4F):** Jointly implemented by **DST (India)** and **Israel Innovation Authority**
- **AI Cooperation MoU:** Signed for frontier technology collaboration
- **Space Cooperation:** Enhanced engagement between **ISRO** and **Israel Space Agency (ISA)**

Cybersecurity:

- **Inaugural Cyber Policy Dialogue** (March 2025)
- **Centre of Excellence in Cybersecurity** to be established in India
- **Multi-year strategic program** with joint roadmap for capacity building and Security by Design principles

Horizon Scanning Mechanism:

- Declaration of Intent signed for **strategic foresight** using data, AI, and expert insights

Agriculture & Water?

Ongoing Initiatives:

- **35 Centres of Excellence** in agriculture operational; **8 additional centres** being established
- **Over 1 million Indian farmers** trained at these centres
- **India-Israel Innovation Centre for Agriculture (IINCA):** MoU between **ICAR** and **MASHAV**
- **20 Joint Fellowships** for agricultural research at **Volcani Agriculture Research Organization**

Water Management:

- Cooperation on **Ganges cleaning**, wastewater treatment, desalination, and water utility reforms
- **Joint Centre of Excellence in Fisheries and Aquaculture** proposed

People-to-People & Mobility?

Workforce Mobility:

- **Framework Agreement** (November 2023) facilitating Indian workers in construction and caregiving sectors
- **Up to 50,000 additional Indian workers** to arrive in Israel over next **5 years**
- Expansion to **high-skill sectors:** Data science, AI, and hi-tech
- **Joint Coordination Committee (JCC)** tasked with resolving worker-related issues

Cultural & Educational Ties:

- **India-Israel Academic Cooperation Forum (I2I Forum):** University-led platform for annual dialogue
- **MoU between Nalanda University and Hebrew University of Jerusalem**
- **Cinema cooperation:** Joint productions and creator exchanges
- **Parliamentary Friendship Group** established in Indian Parliament

Additional Info

Historical Context:

- **1992:** Full diplomatic relations established
- **2017:** Prime Minister Modi's historic visit to Israel; Strategic Partnership established
- **2018:** Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to India
- **2025:** Bilateral Investment Treaty signed

Regional Connectivity Initiatives:

- **IMEC:** Proposed corridor through India-UAE-Jordan-Saudi Arabia-Israel-Europe
- **I2U2:** West Asian Quad focusing on water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security



International

IOM Global Appeal 2026

\$4.7 Billion Appeal for 41 Million Migrants Amid Record Displacement

What's the News?

- The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** launched its **Global Appeal 2026**, requesting **USD 4.7 billion** to assist **41 million people** worldwide.
- The appeal reflects a strategic shift toward sharper prioritization amid constrained global funding and a "Humanitarian Reset."
- **IOM Director General Amy Pope** emphasized the need for system-wide efficiency and dignity-centered migration management.
- Currently, only **USD 1.3 billion** has been secured, leaving a **USD 3.4 billion funding gap**.

Record Displacement and Migration Trends?

- **Internal Displacement Crisis:**
 - **83.4 million** people were internally displaced globally by end-2024 — an all-time high.
 - **73.5 million** displaced by violence and conflict; **9.8 million** by disasters (29% increase from previous year).
 - Disaster-related displacement is accelerating due to climate change impacts.
- **Migration Fatalities:**
 - **2024 was the deadliest year** for migrants since 2014, with **9,197 recorded deaths**.
 - Highlights the dangers of irregular migration routes and lack of safe pathways.
- **Economic Contributions:**
 - **168 million migrant workers** worldwide fill critical labor gaps in healthcare, innovation, and essential services.
 - Migrants sent **USD 905 billion** in remittances globally in 2024 — a vital economic lifeline for developing countries.
- **Restricted Pathways:**
 - Less than **20%** of assessed countries have established programs for regular labor migration.
 - Increasing restrictive policies in host nations are narrowing legal migration channels.

Strategic Objectives and Funding Breakdown?

The Appeal is structured around three strategic objectives aligned with IOM's **Strategic Plan 2024–2028**:

Strategic Objective	Allocation	Focus Areas
Saving lives and protecting people on the move	USD 1.5 billion	Emergency response, protection services, humanitarian assistance

Strategic Objective	Allocation	Focus Areas
Driving solutions to displacement	USD 1.5 billion	Durable solutions, climate mobility innovation, return and reintegration
Facilitating pathways for regular migration	USD 1.3 billion	Labor migration programs, skills partnerships, safe return mechanisms
Core resilience and flexible funding	USD 350 million	Institutional capacity, unearmarked resources for agile response

Key Drivers of Migration?

- **Economic Opportunity:** Primary driver for 168 million labor migrants seeking to fill shortages and stimulate innovation.
- **Conflict and Violence:** Ongoing crises in **Sudan, DR Congo**, and other hotspots continue generating mass displacement.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Extreme weather and climate shocks forcing families into displacement.
- **Protracted Crises:** Long-term displacement exhausting local resources and driving onward migration.
- **Inequality:** Economic disparities pushing people toward dangerous irregular journeys.

Challenges for Migrants?

- **Social Security Gaps:** Many migrants work in informal sectors without access to welfare or health benefits.
- **Hazardous Living Conditions:** Urban overcrowding leads to informal settlements with poor sanitation and infrastructure.
- **Exploitation Risks:** Wage theft, unsafe working conditions, and lack of legal protection prevalent in construction, agriculture, and domestic work sectors.
- **Restrictive Policies:** Host nations increasingly narrowing immigration pathways and raising barriers.
- **Harmful Narratives:** Rising anti-immigrant sentiment fueled by misinformation and disinformation.

Additional Info

- **About IOM:**
 - Established in **1951** as the **Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM)**.
 - Renamed **International Organization for Migration** in **1989**.
 - Became a **UN-related organization** in **2016** through agreement with the UN.
 - **India is a member state** since 1974; IOM India operates in migration management, humanitarian response, and diaspora engagement.

- **Key Frameworks:**
 - **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM):** First inter-governmentally negotiated agreement on migration (adopted 2018).
 - **Strategic Plan 2024–2028:** IOM's current operational roadmap focusing on resilience, innovation, and rights-based approaches.
- **India Context:**
 - India is among the **top recipients** of remittances globally (USD 125+ billion annually).
 - **eShram portal** launched to register unorganized workers including migrants, though implementation challenges persist.
 - India has **disaster-related displacement** exceeding 2 million annually due to floods, cyclones, and climate events.
- **Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM):**
 - IOM's information management system tracking displacement and population mobility.
 - Provides data on numbers, locations, and needs of displaced populations for evidence-based response.

US Launches Project Vault

\$12 Billion Strategic Critical Minerals Stockpile

What's the News?

- **US President Donald Trump** unveiled **Project Vault**, a first-of-its-kind **\$12 billion strategic critical minerals stockpile** to reduce dependence on foreign supply chains, particularly **China**.
- The initiative combines **\$10 billion loan from US Export-Import Bank (EXIM)** and **\$1.67 billion in private capital** — the largest financing in EXIM's history.
- The stockpile aims to secure supply chains for **AI, semiconductors, defence, electric vehicles, and energy technologies**.
- The announcement coincided with the **2026 Critical Minerals Ministerial** hosted by the US State Department with representatives from **54 countries**, including **India**.

Project Vault Structure?

Component	Allocation	Purpose
EXIM Bank Direct Loan	\$10 billion	Procurement and storage of critical minerals for civilian use
Private Capital	\$1.67 billion	Public-private partnership investment
Total	\$11.67 billion (~\$12 billion)	Strategic reserve similar to Strategic Petroleum Reserve

Strategic Objectives?

- **Supply Chain Security:** Shield domestic manufacturers from supply shocks and disruptions.

- **China De-risking:** Reduce dependence on China, which controls **70% of rare earths mining** and **90% of processing**.
- **Price Stabilisation:** Establish price floors to encourage investment and prevent market manipulation.
- **Domestic Production:** Catalyse investment in US mining, refining, and processing capacity.
- **Allied Sourcing:** Secure minerals from friendly jurisdictions through bilateral agreements.

Critical Minerals Coverage?

- **Scope:** All minerals identified as "critical" by **US Geological Survey (USGS)** — more than **50 minerals**.
- **Key Minerals:** **Rare earth elements, lithium, cobalt, copper, nickel, uranium, germanium, gallium.**
- **Applications:**
 - **Semiconductors:** Germanium, gallium for high-tech chips and AI data centers.
 - **Defence:** Rare earths for night-vision devices, precision-guided munitions, radar systems.
 - **Energy:** Lithium, cobalt for batteries; uranium for nuclear energy.
 - **Manufacturing:** Copper for electrification and transmission infrastructure.

2026 Critical Minerals Ministerial?

- **Participants:** **54 countries** and **European Commission** attended, including **India, Japan, Australia, UK, EU, DRC, Saudi Arabia, and Ukraine**.
- **Key Outcomes:**
 - **11 new bilateral agreements** signed with Argentina, Cook Islands, Ecuador, Guinea, Morocco, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, UAE, and Uzbekistan.
 - **FORGE (Forum on Resource Geostrategic Engagement)** launched as successor to Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) — chaired by **Republic of Korea**.
 - **Action Plans** with Mexico, EU, and Japan for coordinated trade policies and price floors.
 - **\$30 billion+** in US government financing mobilised over past six months for critical minerals projects.

US Government Financing?

Agency	Investment	Key Projects
EXIM Bank	\$10 billion (Project Vault)	Strategic stockpile
	\$1.3 billion	Reko Diq (Pakistan) copper/gold
	\$455 million	US rare earth development
	\$400 million	Arkansas lithium extraction
DOE Loan Programs	\$1.25 billion	Korea Zinc smelter (Tennessee)
	\$620 million	Vulcan Elements (North Carolina)

Agency	Investment	Key Projects
DFC	\$600 million	Orion Critical Minerals Consortium
	\$565 million	Brazil rare earth extraction
	\$75 million	Ukraine critical minerals

Implications for India?

- **Strategic Opportunity:** India attended the ministerial, signalling potential for deeper US-India critical minerals cooperation.
- **Supply Chain Diversification:** India can position itself as alternative processing hub to China given its significant rare earth reserves (7th largest globally).
- **Bilateral Engagement:** Potential for India-US critical minerals agreement similar to those signed with other partners.
- **Domestic Push:** Aligns with India's **National Critical Mineral Mission** and **Aatmanirbhar Bharat** goals in high-tech manufacturing.

Additional Info

- **Critical Minerals Context:**
 - US is **100% import-dependent** for **12 critical minerals**.
 - US relies on imports for **more than 50%** of **29 additional critical minerals**.
 - China imposed export restrictions on **7 rare earth minerals** in April 2025 and **5 additional metals** in October 2025.
- **Corporate Participation:**
 - **General Motors, GE Vernova, Western Digital, Boeing** expressed interest in Project Vault.
 - **Ivanhoe Mines** (DRC's Kipushi mine) in discussions to supply germanium and gallium to US.
 - **Korea Zinc** investing **\$7.4 billion** in Tennessee smelter complex.
- **Executive Order Context:**
 - January 2026 EO directs Commerce Secretary to negotiate agreements with foreign partners for processed minerals.
 - Contemplates **tariffs or import restrictions** if satisfactory agreements not reached.
- **Global Reserves (USGS 2024):**
 - Global rare earth reserves: **110 million tonnes**.
 - China holds dominant position in both reserves and processing capacity.

NATO Launches 'Arctic Sentry' Mission Amid Greenland Dispute

What's the News?

- **NATO** has launched a new military effort called "**Arctic Sentry**" aimed at improving security in the **High North** (Arctic region).

- The mission comes a month after **U.S. President Donald Trump** ramped up tensions within the alliance with threats to **annex Greenland**, a semi-autonomous territory under **Denmark**.
- **Arctic Sentry** is not a military operation with permanent troop deployment, but rather a **coordinating framework** bringing together national military exercises under one NATO command structure.

What is Arctic Sentry?

- **Nature:** A label/framework for national military exercises in the Arctic region, not a standalone operation.
- **Coordination:** Activities will be coordinated through NATO's **U.S. headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia**.
- **Initial Exercises:**
 - **Denmark's Arctic Endurance** (which angered Trump, leading to tariff threats against participating allies).
 - **Norway's Cold Response drills**
- **Future Scope:** Additional NATO activities will be added once broader security needs are assessed.

Objectives

- **Counter Influence:** Address **Russian military activity** and **China's growing interest** in the High North.
- **Security Assessment:** Identify and fill security gaps in Arctic defence.
- **Alliance Cohesion:** Move past internal tensions caused by Trump's Greenland annexation threats.
- **Territorial Integrity:** Safeguard NATO members and maintain stability in a strategically significant region.

Military Commitments

- **United Kingdom:** Doubling troops deployed to Norway from **1,000 to 2,000** over three years; participation in **Exercise Lion Protector** (September).
- **France, Germany, Denmark:** Committed to participation but troop numbers not specified.
- **Command:** Led by **U.S. Air Force Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich**, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

Additional Info

NATO's Arctic Members:

- **Founding Arctic Members:** United States, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway.
- **Recent Additions:** **Finland** (joined 2023) and **Sweden** (joined 2024) expanded NATO's Arctic footprint.
- **Total:** 8 out of 32 NATO members have Arctic territories.

Key Arctic Concerns:

- **Climate Change:** Opening of **Northern Sea Route** reducing shipping times between Asia and Europe.
- **Resource Competition:** Access to untapped **hydrocarbons** and **minerals**.
- **Militarisation:** Russia's reopening of Soviet-era bases and deployment of new weapons systems.

NATO's Command Structure:

- **Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR):** Always a U.S. military officer; based at **SHAPE** (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) in Mons, Belgium.

- **Allied Command Operations:** Coordinates all NATO military operations.
- **Norfolk Headquarters:** Focuses on **Atlantic security** and now Arctic coordination.

Historical Context:

- **1951 Defense Agreement:** U.S. established **Thule Air Base** (now Pituffik Space Base) in Greenland during Cold War.
- **1982 Arctic Cooperation:** Nordic countries began regional cooperation, expanded over decades.
- **2022 NATO Strategic Concept:** First to explicitly address Arctic security challenges.

Iran Temporarily Closes Strait of Hormuz for Military Drills Amid Escalating US Tensions

What's the News?

Iran temporarily closed parts of the **Strait of Hormuz**—the world's most critical maritime oil chokepoint—to conduct live-fire military drills named "**Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz**." The rare closure, lasting several hours for "safety and maritime concerns," coincided with indirect **US-Iran nuclear talks in Geneva** and escalating regional tensions. The move signals Tehran's capacity to disrupt global energy flows amid threats of US military action following Iran's crackdown on domestic protests and disputes over its nuclear program.

Strait of Hormuz?

- **Overview:** The world's most vital **oil transit chokepoint** and strategic maritime passage connecting the **Persian Gulf** to the **Gulf of Oman** and onward to the **Indian Ocean**.
- **Geography:**
 - **Length:** Approximately **167 km**.
 - **Width:** Only **33 km** at narrowest point (between Iran and Oman's Musandam Peninsula).
 - **Shipping Lanes:** Two **3-km wide lanes** (inbound/outbound) separated by 2-km buffer due to shallow coastal waters.
 - **Depth:** **60–100 meters**—sufficient for **VLCCs (Very Large Crude Carriers)**.
- **Control:**
 - **Iran:** Northern coastline and strategic islands (**Qeshm, Hormuz, Larak, Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunbs**).
 - **Oman:** Southern coast via **Musandam Peninsula** exclave.
 - **UAE:** Proximity to major commercial hubs like Dubai and Fujairah port.

Global Energy Significance?

- **Volume:** Approximately **20% of world's total petroleum liquids** and **20% of global LNG** pass through daily.
- **Daily Flow:** Roughly **20 million barrels of oil**; **~13 million barrels/day** of crude oil (2025 data—**31% of global seaborne crude shipments**).
- **Destination:** Overwhelming majority directed to **Asian economies** (China, India, Japan, South Korea).

- **Irreplaceability:** US Energy Information Administration states "**most volumes that transit the strait have no alternative means of exiting the region**".
- **Limited Alternatives:** Saudi Arabia and UAE operate pipeline bypasses, but capacity is insufficient for full diversion.
- **Market Impact:** Any closure or slowdown instantly spikes **global oil prices** and **shipping insurance premiums**.

Current Tensions Context?

- **Military Buildup:**
 - **US:** **USS Abraham Lincoln** aircraft carrier and guided-missile destroyers in Arabian Sea; **USS Gerald R. Ford** (world's largest carrier) being deployed from Caribbean to West Asia.
 - **Iran:** Live-fire drills with missiles launched from Iranian territory and coastal positions striking targets in the strait.
- **Recent Incidents:**
 - **February 4:** US Navy fighter jet shot down Iranian drone approaching USS Abraham Lincoln in Arabian Sea.
 - Iranian forces harassed **US-flagged and US-crewed merchant vessel** in the strait.
 - US **Central Command (CENTCOM)** warned Iran against "unsafe and unprofessional behavior".
- **Domestic Pressure:** Iran faces widespread anti-government protests (late December/January) met with violent crackdown (thousands killed); economic hardship exacerbated by sanctions.

Nuclear Diplomacy?

- **Geneva Talks:** Indirect negotiations mediated by **Oman** involving Iranian Foreign Minister **Abbas Araqchi**, US Special Envoy **Steve Witkoff**, and **Jared Kushner**.
- **Outcome:** Broad understanding on "guiding principles" reached; "significant details" remain unresolved.
- **Iranian Position:**
 - Uranium enrichment will not be abandoned entirely.
 - Missile capabilities **non-negotiable**.
 - Seeks **sanctions relief** in exchange for nuclear limits.
- **US Position:** Threatening military force to pressure concessions; seeks broader restrictions including missiles.
- **Historical Context:** US and Israel conducted strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities in **mid-2025** using **B-2 stealth bombers**; Iran subsequently halted enrichment activity.

Israeli Strikes Kill 10 in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley; Hezbollah Vows Resistance

What's the News?

- **Israeli airstrikes** have killed **10 people** in **Lebanon's Bekaa Valley**, including **8 Hezbollah operatives** and **2 Hamas members**.
- The strikes targeted alleged **command centres** in **Baalbek** and southern Lebanon regions.

- **Hezbollah** has declared that "**resistance**" is the only option following the deadly attacks .
- The incident occurred despite a **ceasefire agreement** that has been in effect since **November 2024** .
- **Lebanon's government** has documented over **2,000 Israeli sovereignty breaches** in recent months .

Strike Details

Aspect	Details
Location	Bekaa Valley (Baalbek), Southern Lebanon
Casualties	10 killed (8 Hezbollah, 2 Hamas operatives)
Date	February 20, 2026
Target	Alleged Hezbollah and Hamas command centres
Ceasefire Status	In effect since November 2024
Hezbollah Response	Vowed continued armed resistance

Hezbollah's Response and Resistance?

- **Mahmud Qamati**, a senior official of the group, termed the strikes a "new massacre" and asserted that "resistance" is the only remaining option to defend Lebanese sovereignty.
- **Ideological Stance:** The group maintains that its armed presence is a necessary deterrent against Israeli "aggression," rejecting calls from the Lebanese government for total disarmament.
- **Geopolitical Pressure:** The escalation occurs amidst heightened tensions between the **United States** and **Iran**, with Hezbollah coming under renewed pressure to align its actions with Tehran's regional strategy.

Ceasefire Violations: Data Overview

- **November 2024:** Ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah came into effect .
- **Last 3 Months of 2025:** Lebanon documented **2,036 Israeli breaches** of sovereignty .
- **February 2026:** Israeli operations killed **14 people** in Lebanon (February 16-22) .
- **Displaced Population:** Over **64,000 Lebanese** remain displaced even after ceasefire .
- **Daily Strikes:** Israeli airstrikes have occurred almost daily despite ceasefire .

Additional Info

- **Geographical and Political Context:**
 - **Bekaa Valley:** A fertile valley in eastern Lebanon that serves as a strategic stronghold for Hezbollah due to its proximity to the Syrian border.
 - **Baalbek:** An ancient city and **UNESCO World Heritage site** within the Bekaa Valley, often used as a logistical hub by the group.
- **International Mediation:**
 - **November 2024 Ceasefire:** A truce designed to end the 2024 Israel-Hezbollah war, which

saw significant displacement in both southern Lebanon and northern Israel.

- **Litani River Buffer:** The ceasefire terms originally mandated that Hezbollah move its heavy weaponry north of the **Litani River**, a condition Israel claims has not been fully met.
- **Regional Implications:**
 - The strikes threaten to destabilize the Lebanese state, which is currently undergoing a phased plan by the **Lebanese Army** to assert control over the country's southern regions.
 - India's interest in the region remains high due to the presence of **UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon)** peacekeepers, including a significant Indian contingent stationed in southern Lebanon.

U.S. Departs from Global Radiation Safety Standards: The LNT and ALARA Shift

What's the News?

- The **U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)** has officially eliminated the **ALARA** (As Low As Reasonably Achievable) principle from its radiation protection directives.
- This move represents a significant departure from the **Linear No-Threshold (LNT)** model, which has served as the conceptual foundation for global radiation safety for over five decades.

The Linear No-Threshold (LNT) Model?

- **Core Principle:** It assumes that any exposure to ionizing radiation, regardless of how small the dose, carries a proportional risk of causing harmful effects, such as cancer.
- **No Safe Threshold:** Under this model, there is no "safe" level of radiation; even the smallest dose is assumed to potentially cause cellular damage.
- **Global Endorsement:** It is supported by the **International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP)** and the **United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR)**.
- **Regulatory Function:** It provides a conservative, precautionary basis for setting dose limits for nuclear workers and the general public worldwide.

ALARA Principle & the Shift?

- **Definition:** **ALARA** stands for "**As Low As Reasonably Achievable.**" It is an operational philosophy that requires licensees to minimize radiation exposure far below regulatory limits, considering economic and societal factors.
- **Shift in Policy:** The **U.S. DOE** has transitioned toward a framework focused on fixed, "science-based" limits rather than the continuous minimization of dose.
- **Objectives:** The shift is intended to accelerate the deployment of small modular reactors (**SMRs**) and micro-reactors by reducing the "regulatory ratchet" that increases costs without necessarily improving safety outcomes.

- **Controversy:** Critics argue that moving away from **ALARA** could undermine worker safety and erode public trust in nuclear energy by weakening long-standing precautionary measures.

Additional Information

International Radiation Safety Framework

- **IAEA Standards:** International Atomic Energy Agency continues to endorse **ALARA principle**.
- **ICRP Recommendations:** International Commission on Radiological Protection supports **LNT model**.
- **EU Regulations:** European Union maintains **strict radiation protection directives**.
- **India's Position: Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** follows IAEA guidelines with ALARA implementation.

India's Regulatory Framework:

- **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB):** Strictly enforces ALARA principle across all nuclear facilities
- **Dose Limits:** 20 mSv/year for workers, with ALARA mandate to keep actual doses significantly lower
- **Alignment:** Full compliance with ICRP and IAEA international standards

Indian Nuclear Legislation:

- **Atomic Energy Act, 1962:** Governs nuclear energy development; currently restricts operations to government-controlled entities (**NPCIL, BHAVINI**)
 - **Proposed Amendments:** Allow private sector participation and establish independent regulator separating AERB from Department of Atomic Energy
- **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA), 2010:**
 - **Operator Liability:** Strict no-fault liability up to **₹1,500 crore** (requires insurance/financial security)
 - **Supplier Liability:** Unique provision holding suppliers accountable beyond operator liability
 - **Time Limits:** 10 years for property damage, 20 years for personal injury claims
 - **Enactment Context:** Response to **Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984)** concerns
 - **Insurance Pool:** **₹1,500 crore** pool established in 2019 (limited foreign investor interest)

US Supreme Court Limits Executive Tariff Power: IEEPA Ruling & Global Trade Implications

What's the News?

- The **US Supreme Court** ruled 6-3 in *Learning Resources, Inc. v. Trump* that the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 1977** does not authorize the President to impose unilateral tariffs on imports.
- The judgment reaffirms that under **Article I of the US Constitution**, the power to "lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises" resides exclusively with **Congress**, not the Executive.
- In response, the US administration invoked **Section 122 of the Trade Act, 1974** to impose a temporary **15% global import surcharge** (capped at 150 days), creating

renewed uncertainty for trading partners including **India**.

IEEPA 1977: Scope vs. Judicial Interpretation

- **Original Intent:** Enacted to empower the President to regulate international commerce during *national emergencies* (e.g., sanctions, asset freezes), not to levy revenue-generating tariffs.
- **Key Statutory Language:** IEEPA authorizes the President to "regulate, direct and compel, nullify, void, prevent or prohibit" imports—but notably omits explicit reference to "tariffs" or "duties".
- **Court's Reasoning:**
 - The term "regulate" in statutory context does not encompass taxation; Congress delegates tariff authority through explicit, limited statutes like **Section 232** (Trade Expansion Act) or **Section 301** (Trade Act).
 - Historical practice: No President invoked IEEPA for tariffs between 1977–2025, indicating the authority was not "well-settled".

Section 122: The New Temporary Tariff Mechanism

- **Legal Basis:** Allows the President to impose an import surcharge of **up to 15%** for **up to 150 days** to address "large and serious balance-of-payments deficits".
- **Key Limitations:**
 - Must apply **equally to all trading partners** (non-discriminatory).
 - Requires renewal via fresh proclamation after 150 days; no automatic extension.
 - Predicate condition ("balance-of-payments deficit") is economically distinct from "trade deficit," raising legal vulnerability.
- **Strategic Shift:** Moves US tariff policy from emergency-based, country-specific levies to a time-bound, uniform surcharge—reducing arbitrariness but preserving protectionist intent.

India-Specific Implications & Trade Governance Lessons

- **Immediate Impact:**
 - Relief from IEEPA-based "reciprocal tariffs" that had reached **50%** on select Indian goods; replaced by the 15% Section 122 surcharge.
 - Potential refund claims on **\$175 billion** in collected IEEPA tariffs may disrupt US importers' cash flows, indirectly affecting Indian export orders.
- **Policy Uncertainty:**
 - Short-term predictability from the 150-day cap vs. long-term risk of repeated emergency declarations under alternative statutes.
 - India's interim trade deal (Feb 2026) includes a "reciprocal modification" clause, enabling recalibration if US tariffs change.
- **Governance Takeaway for India:**
 - Reinforces **separation of powers** as a check on executive overreach in economic policy—a principle relevant to debates on ordinance-making, delegated legislation, and regulatory autonomy in India.
 - Highlights importance of **statutory clarity:** Ambiguous enabling provisions (like "regulate")

invite judicial scrutiny when used for high-stakes fiscal measures.

Additional Info

- **Constitutional & Legal Framework:**
 - **US Context:** Article I, Section 8 grants Congress exclusive taxing power; *Learning Resources* reaffirms this against expansive executive claims under emergency statutes.
 - **Indian Parallel: Article 265** ("No tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law") and **Article 246** (Union List Entry 83: customs duties) similarly anchor taxing power in legislative authority.
- **Policy Linkages:**
 - **WTO Consistency:** Unilateral tariffs risk violating **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN)** and **Bound Tariff** commitments under GATT; India may challenge discriminatory measures at the **WTO Dispute Settlement Body**.
 - **Domestic Safeguards:** India's **Customs Act, 1962** and **Foreign Trade (Development & Regulation) Act, 1992** require parliamentary oversight for major tariff changes—aligning with the SCOTUS emphasis on legislative primacy.

Pakistan Declares "Open War" on Afghanistan

What's the News?

Pakistan's Defence Minister **Khawaja Asif** declared "**open war**" with Afghanistan following a sharp escalation in cross-border hostilities. The conflict intensified after **Pakistan Air Force (PAF)** conducted **airstrikes on Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia province** in Afghanistan, targeting what Islamabad claimed were **Taliban military installations**. This followed Afghan forces' retaliatory attacks on Pakistani border positions. Both nations have launched full-scale military operations, marking the most serious confrontation between the neighbours in decades.

Operation Ghazab Lil Haq?

Overview:

Pakistan launched "**Operation Ghazab Lil Haq**" (Arabic: "Wrath for the Truth") against the Taliban government, involving:

- **Airstrikes on 22 locations** across Afghanistan including capital Kabul
- **Artillery and ground operations** along the **Durand Line** (2,611 km border)
- Targeting of **Taliban brigade headquarters, ammunition depots, and border posts**

Pakistan's Claims:

- **274 Taliban fighters killed, over 400 injured**
- **83 Taliban posts destroyed, 17 captured**
- **80+ pieces of equipment** destroyed (tanks, artillery, APCs)
- **12 Pakistani soldiers killed, 27 injured** in retaliatory attacks

Afghanistan's Claims:

- **55 Pakistani soldiers killed** in retaliatory operations

- **Two Pakistani military bases captured**
- **Only 8 Afghan soldiers killed, 11 wounded**
- Civilian casualties including **women and children** in Kabul strikes

Background & Triggers?

Immediate Triggers:

- **February 21, 2026:** Pakistan conducted initial airstrikes on **Nangarhar, Paktika, and Khost provinces** targeting alleged **TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan)** and **ISIS-K** camps
- **February 26, 2026:** Afghanistan launched "**retaliatory operations**" against Pakistani border posts
- **February 27, 2026:** Pakistan declared "**open war**" and expanded strikes to Kabul and Kandahar

Core Dispute:

- Pakistan accuses Taliban of harbouring **TTP militants** using Afghan soil to launch attacks inside Pakistan
- **February 2026 attacks in Pakistan:**
 - **Islamabad mosque bombing:** 36 killed (Shiite mosque)
 - **Bajaur checkpoint attack:** 11 soldiers + 1 child killed
 - **Bannu attack:** Multiple casualties

Historical Context:

- **October 2025:** Qatar-mediated ceasefire after deadliest border clashes in years (70+ killed)
- **February 11, 2026:** Pakistan warned of pre-Ramadan strikes if Taliban didn't curb militant activity
- **Durand Line dispute:** Unresolved border demarcation since British colonial era

International Reactions?

India:

- **Strongly condemned** Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghan territory
- Called it "**another attempt by Pakistan to externalise its internal failures**"
- Expressed support for **Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity**

China:

- **"Deeply concerned"** over escalation
- Urged both sides to exercise restraint

Iran:

- Foreign Minister **Abbas Araghchi** urged dialogue during **holy month of Ramadan**
- Called for "**self-restraint and Islamic solidarity**"

United Nations:

- **UNAMA** confirmed **13+ civilian casualties** from initial Pakistani strikes
- Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres** urged adherence to international law
- **UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett** expressed concern over child casualties

Russia:

- Offered to **mediate** between the two countries
- Called for immediate halt to cross-border attacks

Qatar & Turkey:

- **Qatar:** Discussed tension reduction with Pakistani Foreign Minister
- **Turkey:** Foreign Minister **Hakan Fidan** held calls with both sides

United Kingdom:

- Urged immediate **de-escalation** and return to **mediated dialogue**

United States:

- Former Ambassador **Zalmay Khalilzad** called attacks a "terrible dynamic that must stop"
- Proposed **diplomatic agreement** monitored by third party (suggested Turkey)

Additional Info

Key Entities:

- **TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan):** Pakistani militant group ideologically aligned with Afghan Taliban but operationally distinct
- **ISIS-K:** Islamic State – Khorasan Province, active in Afghanistan-Pakistan region
- **Durand Line:** 2,611 km disputed border established in 1893
- **UNAMA:** United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

Casualty Data (Conflicting Claims):

Source	Claim
Pakistan	274 Taliban killed, 12 Pakistani soldiers killed
Afghanistan	55 Pakistani soldiers killed, 8 Afghan soldiers killed
UNAMA	13+ civilians killed in initial strikes

Border Crossings:

- **Torkham crossing:** Remained open for Afghan refugees returning from Pakistan despite conflict
- **Other crossings:** Largely shut since October 2025 clashes

Previous Mediation:

- **October 2025 ceasefire:** Qatar-mediated truce lasted until early 2026
- **Saudi Arabia:** Facilitated release of 3 Pakistani soldiers captured in October 2025

Stated Objectives & Regime Change Narrative

Official Rationale

- **Trump's statement:** Eliminate imminent threats, prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, cited decades of hostility and support for militant groups
- **Netanyahu's statement:** Create conditions for "brave Iranian people to take their destiny into their own hands"; remove "yoke of tyranny"

Explicit Regime Change Calls

- Trump urged Iranians: "**Take over your government—it will be yours to take**" and "**your only chance for generations**"
- Netanyahu called for "all sections of the people in Iran" to bring "a free and peace-loving Iran"

- Both leaders framed military action as enabling popular uprising against clerical rule

Strategic Context & Background

Preceding Events

- **June 2025:** US-Israel joint strikes on three Iranian nuclear sites (limited scope)
- **February 27, 2026:** Third round of US-Iran nuclear negotiations in Switzerland ended unsatisfactorily (per Trump)
- **Proxy network degradation:** Prior Israeli strikes eliminated **Hassan Nasrallah** (Hezbollah), **Yahya Sinwar** (Hamas), and **Ahmed al-Rahawi** (Houthis)
- **Military buildup:** US assembled largest West Asian military presence in decades

Iran's Position

- **Nuclear programme:** Self-imposed limit of **2,000 km** missile range; no public evidence of ICBM development
- **Negotiation stance:** Maintained right to uranium enrichment; unwilling to discuss missile programme or regional proxies
- **Retaliation warning:** Threatened targeting of US personnel and bases across region

Geopolitical Implications

Regional Risks

- **Gulf stability:** Potential destabilization of energy markets and regional security architecture
- **Power vacuum concerns:** Uncertainty whether regime collapse would produce democratic transition or internal conflict/power struggles among security institutions
- **Succession crisis:** No designated successor to Khamenei; system lacks clear institutional mechanism for leadership transition

International Response

- **India:** Issued advisory for citizens in Israel to exercise "utmost caution," avoid non-essential travel, follow Home Front Command guidelines
- **Iraq:** Closed airspace immediately following strikes
- **Domestic US:** Congressional Democrats condemned strikes as unconstitutional without authorization; **War Powers Resolution** introduced by **Reps. Thomas Massie (R-KY)** and **Ro Khanna (D-CA)**

Miscellaneous

RCB Clinches Second WPL Title with Record-Breaking Chase

What's the News?

- **Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB)** were crowned champions of the **Women's Premier League (WPL) 2026** after defeating **Delhi Capitals (DC)** by **six wickets** in the final.
- The final was held at the **Baroda Cricket Association (BCA) Stadium** in Vadodara, Gujarat.
- RCB successfully chased down a target of **204**, marking the **highest successful run chase in WPL history**.
- This victory marks RCB's **second WPL title** (following their win in 2024), while Delhi Capitals suffered their **fourth consecutive heartbreak** in a WPL final.

Match Summary

- **Venue: Kotambi Stadium (BCA Stadium), Vadodara** — hosted the WPL final for the first time.
- **Toss:** RCB won and elected to **field first**.
- **Delhi Capitals Innings:** Posted **203/5** in 20 overs.
 - **Chinelle Henry:** Unbeaten **35 off 15 balls** (late acceleration).
 - Strong contributions from top order to set a competitive target.
- **Royal Challengers Bengaluru Innings:** Successfully chased **204 runs** with wickets in hand.
 - **Smriti Mandhana (c): 87 off 41 balls** — captain's knock anchoring the chase.
 - **Georgia Voll: 79 runs** — key partnership of **165 runs for the second wicket** with Mandhana.
 - **Richa Ghosh** and **Nadine de Klerk:** Finished the match under pressure.
- **Result:** RCB won by **6 wickets**, securing back-to-back titles.

WPL 2026 Award Winners?

- **Orange Cap (Most Runs): Smriti Mandhana (RCB)**, who finished the season with **377 runs** in nine matches.
- **Purple Cap (Most Wickets): Sophie Devine (Gujarat Giants)**, with **17 wickets** at a superior economy rate of 8.28.
- **Most Valuable Player (MVP): Sophie Devine (Gujarat Giants)** for her all-round performance.
- **Emerging Player of the Season: Nandini Sharma (DC)**, who took 17 wickets, the most by any Indian bowler in a single WPL edition.
- **Player of the Match (Final): Smriti Mandhana** for her match-winning 87.

India Thrash Pakistan by 61 Runs in T20 World Cup 2026 Group Clash

What's the News?

- **India defeated Pakistan by 61 runs** in the **27th match** of **ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026** at **R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo**.

- The Group A encounter saw India post a competitive total before bowling out Pakistan for **114**, securing their third consecutive victory and booking a spot in the **Super 8 stage**.
- The match marked the **ninth World Cup meeting** between the arch-rivals, with India extending their dominant head-to-head record.

Match Summary & Key Performances

- **Toss:** Pakistan elected to field first
- **India's Innings:** Posted a challenging total (exact score not specified in available data)
- **Pakistan's Innings: All out for 114 runs** in 18 overs
- **Result: India won by 61 runs;** India 2 points, Pakistan 0 points
- **Notable Record:** Shaheen Shah Afridi and Usman Tariq's **17-run partnership** for the 10th wicket became Pakistan's highest for the final wicket in Men's T20 World Cup history, surpassing the previous record of 15 runs

Tournament Context & Significance

- **Group A Standing:** Both teams entered the match with **2 wins from 2 opening matches**; this result secured India's progression to the Super 8 stage.
- **Super 8 Qualification:** The winner of this clash was assured of advancing to the next round of the tournament.
- **India-Pakistan Rivalry:** This marked India's **eighth World Cup victory** over Pakistan across formats, against Pakistan's solitary win in World Cup encounters.
- **Recent Dominance:** India entered the match with **three consecutive T20I wins** over Pakistan from the **Asia Cup 2025 campaign**, where India emerged champions.

Additional Info

- **Tournament Details: ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026** co-hosted by **India and Sri Lanka** (7 February – 8 March 2026)
- **Format:** 20 teams, 55 matches; four groups of five teams, followed by Super Eight stage, semi-finals, and final
- **Venue: R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo** one of Sri Lanka's premier cricket venues with 35,000+ capacity
- **Indian Captain: Suryakumar Yadav** leading the side in this tournament
- **ICC Structure: International Cricket Council (ICC)** headquartered in Dubai; governs international cricket with India being a major revenue contributor through BCCI