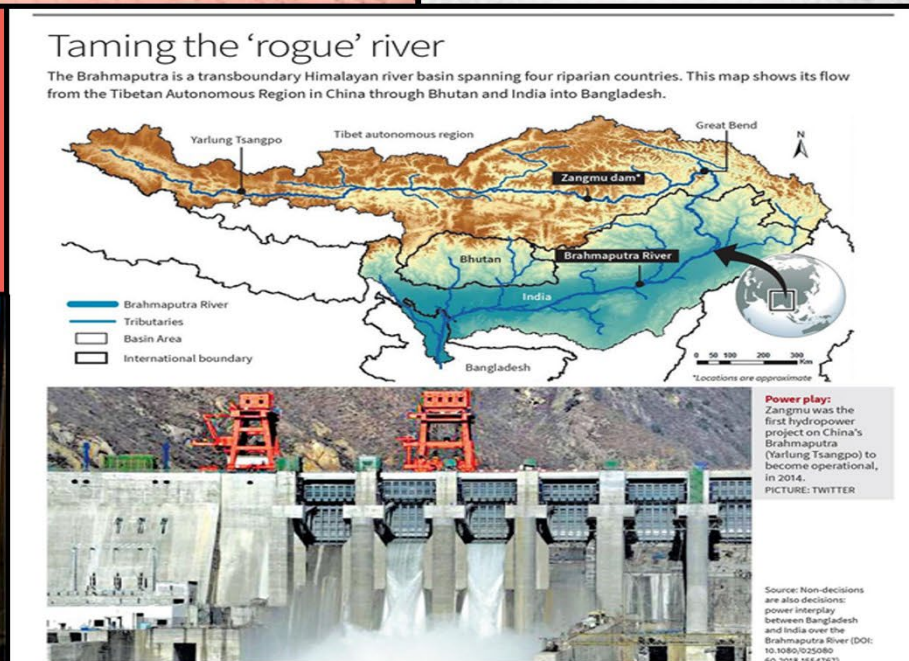




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NATIONAL NEWS

Indian Railways Launches ‘Sanraksha’ Mobile App to Boost Passenger Safety

- ★ Indian Railways has introduced the ‘Sanraksha’ mobile application, an innovative step towards improving passenger safety and security.
- ★ The app leverages advanced technologies like data analytics and has potential future integration with AI to enhance the capacity of railway staff and ensure safer journeys for passengers.
- ★ It aims to enhance railway safety by providing targeted capacity-building tools for frontline safety staff.
- ★ It combines railway domain knowledge with IT and data analytics, with plans to integrate AI in the future.
- ★ It also features smart learning modules and real-time feedback mechanisms to track and improve safety performance.

Odisha Government Approves Investment Proposals Worth ₹1.36 Trillion Across Multiple Sectors

- ★ The Odisha Government has approved 20 investment projects worth ₹1.36 lakh crore through the High-Level Clearance Authority (HLCA), which is headed by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.
- ★ These projects are expected to generate employment for over 74,350 people, contributing significantly to the state’s economic growth.
- ★ The approved projects span 9 sectors, including Steel, Chemicals, Aluminium, Aviation fuel, Green energy and equipment, Apparel and textiles, Power and renewable energy, Cement
- ★ The projects will be set up in 10 districts across Odisha, such as Jajpur, Jharsuguda, Khurda, Sambalpur, Ganjam, Kalahandi, Malkangiri, Dhenkanal, Bhadrak, and Jagatsinghpur.
- ★ Over the past six months, Odisha has attracted over ₹1.80 lakh crore in investments through 73 industrial projects, generating employment for over 1.1 lakh individuals.

Narasapur Crochet Lace Craft Receives Geographical Indication Tag

- ★ The Narasapur crochet lace craft has been awarded the Geographical Indications (GI) tag by the Geographical Indications Registry (GIR) under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- ★ The registration date for the GI tag is March 1, 2024.
- ★ The craft is geographically limited to 19 mandals in the West Godavari and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Konaseema districts of Andhra Pradesh.

- ★ Narsapur, Palakollu, Razole, and Amalapuram are the major trade hubs for this craft.
- ★ Narasapur crochet lace-making has a history dating back to the 19th century.
- ★ Nearly 15,000 women are directly involved in producing three main categories of products: garments, home furnishings, and accessories.

EPFO Approves Amnesty Scheme for Employers

- ★ The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has introduced the Amnesty Scheme 2024, aimed at encouraging compliance among employers.
- ★ This initiative provides a limited-time opportunity for employers to deposit past provident fund dues without penalties.

Objectives and Benefits:

- ★ Voluntary Compliance: Employers can disclose and rectify past non-compliance without legal or financial repercussions.
- ★ Formalization of Workforce: Encourages more employers to bring workers under the formal social security framework.
- ★ Ease of Declaration: Requires only a simple online declaration to avail of benefits.
- ★ Boost to Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme: Facilitates implementation of ELI announced in the FY25 budget to promote employment generation and job formalization.
- ★ The Amnesty Scheme 2024 provides confidence to employers, especially MSMEs, to enroll without fear of penalties.
- ★ Amendments to interest and claim processing improve member benefits and grievance redressal.
- ★ Investments in diverse instruments like ETFs, InvITs, and REITs aim to optimise returns for EPFO's interest account, benefiting members.

Kolkata International Film Festival Designates France as a Focus Country

- ★ The 30th edition of the Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF) will begin on December 4, 2024 and run until December 11, 2024.
- ★ The festival will feature 175 films from 29 countries, showcasing a diverse range of cinematic works.
- ★ The festival will include special screenings of classic Indian and international films.
- ★ France is the focus country of this year's festival, with a selection of 21 French films.
- ★ The French selection includes contemporary films by women directors, French classics, short films, and documentaries.
- ★ The festival will also feature films screened with projections from their original celluloid format, including Chokh and Debsishu by Utpalendu Chakraborty.
- ★ The festival will honour centenary tributes to renowned film personalities such as: Tapan Sinha, Marlon Brando, Akkineni Nageswara Rao, Talat Mahmood, Mohammed Rafi, and Sergei Parajanov.

Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan or Accessible India Campaign Complete 9 Years

- ★ The Government of India's flagship programme for Persons with Disabilities, Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan, or the Accessible India Campaign, completed 9 years on 3rd December 2024.
- ★ The Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan, or the Accessible India Campaign, was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 3rd December 2015, on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
- ★ The Campaign aims to raise public awareness about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities or Divyangjans in accessing public buildings, public transport, etc.
- ★ It aims to solve these problems by creating an accessible environment.
- ★ India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and has committed to creating an accessible environment for people with disabilities.
- ★ The Campaign aims to achieve universal accessibility for Divyangjans across India.
- ★ The Government had set a target to achieve these targets by March 2024, but the campaign objectives have been absorbed into the Creation of a Barrier-Free Environment Scheme under the broader umbrella of the Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (SIPDA).

Uber Starts India's First Water Transport Service in Srinagar

- ★ The American multinational ride-hailing app Uber has launched its first water transport service in India with the onboarding of the Shikaras at the iconic Dal Lake in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir.
- ★ For the first time, a ride-hailing app in India has launched a booking service for water transport in India.
- ★ Shikaras are houseboats that resemble the gondolas of Venice but are smaller in size and are tastefully decorated.
- ★ Uber offers water transport services in some European countries, including Venice, Italy.
- ★ However, the service introduced in Srinagar was the first such service launched by the company in Asia.
- ★ According to Uber, seven Shikara owners have signed an agreement with it, and Uber users can book shikaras at Government-determined rates.
- ★ The company said Uber is not charging any fees from its shikara partners and will pass the entire amount on to them.
- ★ The launch of the Uber service is expected to provide an assured income to the Shikara operators.
- ★ To the tourists, it will offer ease of convenience in booking shikaras, end the bargaining of rates with the shikara owners, and boost tourism in the area.

Telangana Set to Follow Andhra Pradesh in Scrapping Two-Child Policy

- ★ Telangana is considering scrapping its "two-child policy", which prohibits individuals with more than two children from contesting local body elections.

- ★ This move is part of a larger trend, as neighbouring Andhra Pradesh already did away with the policy.
- ★ Telangana will need to amend its Panchayat Raj Act, 2018, for the policy to be reversed.
- ★ There is a concern that the state's population will age, and by 2047, Telangana will need more children or younger individuals to support the elderly population.
- ★ Andhra Pradesh's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is low at 1.5, compared to the national average of 2.11, which could impact future productivity.

PM Modi Dedicate Three New Criminal Laws to the Nation

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated to the nation the successful implementation of the three new criminal laws: Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam 2023 at a function held in Chandigarh on 3 December 2024.
- ★ The function was organised in Chandigarh as Chandigarh is India's first state/Union Territory to have fully implemented the three new criminal laws.
- ★ Union Minister Amit Shah said the three new criminal laws will be implemented in the country within three years.
- ★ The three new criminal laws, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam 2023, were implemented on 1st July 2024.
- ★ The three new criminal laws replace the British-era criminal laws and seek to make the country's legal justice system more transparent, efficient, and modern.
- ★ The three new laws replace the following laws:
 - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced the Indian Penal Code 1860,
 - Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, which replaced the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and
 - Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, will replace the Indian Evidence Act of 1872.
- ★ The Union Home Ministry has also launched four apps — e-Sakshya, Nyaya Setu, Nyaya Shruti, and e-Summon — to ensure the country's smooth implementation of the three new criminal laws.

57th Tiger Reserve of India

- ★ The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change have notified Ratapani Tiger Reserve of Madhya Pradesh as the 57th Tiger Reserve of the country under the centrally sponsored scheme Project Tiger.
- ★ The Ratapani Tiger Reserve is situated in the Raisen and Sehore districts of Madhya Pradesh.
- ★ It is spread over 1271.4 sq km, and the reserve's core area is 763.8 sq km.
- ★ Nestled in the Vindhyan hills, the reserve has many historical monuments, such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site "Bhimbetka Rock Shelters", Ginnourgarh Fort, Keri Mahadeo, Ratapani Dam, and Jholiyapur Dam.
- ★ The forest in Ratapani is dry deciduous and moist deciduous type.
- ★ About 55 per cent of the area is covered by teak.

- ★ The reserves contain around 40 tigers, more than 35 species of mammals, 33 species of reptiles, 14 species of fish, 10 species of amphibians, and 104 species of butterflies.
- ★ The recently notified Ratapani Tiger Reserve is the eighth Tiger Reserve of the state

Telangana Launches Transgender Clinics in all 33 Districts

- ★ Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy inaugurated 33 transgender clinics (Maitri Clinics), one in each district of Telangana on December 2, 2024.
- ★ Objective is to provide free health check-ups, diagnostic tests, and medicines for transgender individuals, ensuring inclusive healthcare.
- ★ Each clinic is staffed by a medical doctor trained in transgender healthcare, a counsellor, and a transgender Community Champion.
- ★ Clinics operate every Tuesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- ★ The initiative is India's first comprehensive state-wide healthcare support system dedicated to transgender individuals.

International Gita Mahotsav 2024

- ★ The Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya inaugurated the International Gita Mahotsav at Kurukshetra, Haryana, on 5 December 2024.
- ★ The Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Lt. General (Retd.) Gurmit Singh, Governor of Uttarakhand, Arif Muhammad Khan, Governor of Kerala and Ms Tabia, Minister for Information, Youth and Culture, Zanzibar, were also present.
- ★ The 2024 International Gita Mahotsav is being held in Kurukshetra, Haryana, from 28th November -15 December 2024.
- ★ The International Gita Mahotsav commemorates the birth of 'Srimad Bhagwat Gita', the sacred scripture containing advice of Lord Krishna that he gave to Arjuna in Kurukshetra on the first day of the famous 18-day battle in the Mahabharata.
- ★ The annual International Gita Mahotsav is organised by the Kurukshetra Development Board of Haryana Tourism in collaboration with the Government of Haryana.
- ★ This year, Tanzania, an African country, is the foreign partner country, and Odisha is the State partner.
- ★ During the Gita Mahotsav, various cultural and religious functions, such as yajnas, Gita readings, bhajans, aartis, dance, and dramas, take place.

Government Launches SCAN Portal to Streamline PDS System

- ★ The Ministry Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Government of India has launched SCAN (Subsidy Claim Application for NFSA) Portal and 'Anna Chakra' to modernise the Public Distribution System in the country.
- ★ The SCAN Portal and the Anna Chakra tool is expected to increase the efficiency of the world's largest public distribution system.

- ★ The Public Distribution System is part of the Food Security system of the country where the targeted poor and vulnerable section of the population are provided food grains at a highly subsidised price or even free.
- ★ The SCAN (Subsidy Claim Application for NFSA) Portal is a single window system for settlement of claims of subsidy under the Public Distribution System.
- ★ Under the Public Distribution System apart from the Food Corporation of India the State Government also procures foodgrains from the farmers and hand it over to the FCI which maintains the buffer stock.
- ★ From this buffer stock foodgrains are provided to the states to distribute to the beneficiaries of various Central Government schemes covered under National Food Security Act (NFSA) and Other Welfare Schemes.
- ★ The Anna Chakra is PDS Supply Chain optimization tool of the DFPD. It has been developed by the Ministry in collaboration with the World Food Programme and IIT Delhi's Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer.
- ★ The Anna Chakra is an online system developed to improve the efficiency in the logistics of the food grains supply across the country.
- ★ It will track the movement of foodgrains from the farmers to the Godowns and to the ration shops. It will identify the best supply route using advanced algorithms.

25th Hornbill Festival kickstarts in Nagaland

- ★ The Hornbill Festival continued its 25th anniversary celebrations on Day 4 under the theme “Cultural Connect”, showcasing an impressive array of traditional performances from various tribes of Nagaland.
- ★ The Hornbill Festival is an annual event celebrated from 1st to 10th December in the northeastern Indian state of Nagaland.
- ★ Known as the Festival of Festivals, it brings together the ethnic diversity of Nagaland, showcasing the culture, traditions, and rituals of the various tribes that call the state home.
- ★ The hornbill symbolizes the strength, courage, and traditions of the people, making it the perfect emblem for the festival, which celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the state's diverse tribes.

NHAI to Issue Green Bonds for Delhi-Mumbai Expressway Project

- ★ The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), through its fully owned Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), DME Development Limited (DMEDL), has announced its plan to issue green bonds to fund environmental sustainability initiatives for the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway project.
- ★ This marks a significant step towards incorporating eco-friendly measures in road infrastructure development.
- ★ The green bond issue will be up to ₹ 1,000 Crores, with an initial base issue size of ₹ 500 Crores.
- ★ There is a provision to retain oversubscription, allowing an additional ₹ 500 Crores if demand exceeds expectations.
- ★ The issue is expected to launch in the second week of December 2024.

- ★ The issuance will follow a closed bidding system, ensuring transparency and compliance with Government of India's sovereign green bonds framework, international protocols, and SEBI guidelines.
- ★ The bonds will help fund projects aimed at reducing energy consumption, lowering the environmental impact of vehicular emissions, and fostering greener highways.

ICAR Approves Establishment of Two Cotton Research Centres In Telangana

- ★ The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has approved the establishment of two All India Coordinated Research Project (ACRIP) Centres on cotton in Telangana.
- ★ The two centres will be established at Warangal (main centre) and Adilabad (sub-centre).
- ★ After the bifurcation of Telangana, the state lost its representation in national-level cotton research co-ordination centres.
- ★ PJTSAU officials approached ICAR, requesting the sanctioning of a research programme under the all-India programme, leading to the proposal for two cotton research centres.
- ★ ICAR will provide the necessary staff and funding to support cotton research at PJTSAU.
- ★ The centres are expected to begin full-fledged research activities from the next financial year.

Andhra Pradesh Partners with Google

- ★ The Andhra Pradesh State Government has signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Google to propel advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and foster innovation in the region.
- ★ The MoU was formalized in the presence of Human Resource Development and Real-Time Governance (RTG) Minister Nara Lokesh, highlighting a shared vision to leverage technology for societal progress.
- ★ AI Training for Students: Skill development programs in schools and colleges to prepare students for AI-driven careers.
- ★ Support for Startups and Industries: Dedicated AI training for startups, small businesses, and traditional industries to enable technology adoption.
- ★ This agreement marks a significant stride towards integrating AI and Machine Learning (ML) into the State's development strategy, focusing on:
 - Economic Development: Boosting startups, small businesses, and digital infrastructure.
 - Social Impact: Enhancing healthcare, education, and sustainability initiatives.
 - Global Opportunities: Positioning Andhra Pradesh as a hub for AI innovation and preparing youth for global AI-driven markets.

PM Modi Inaugurates Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024 and the Rajasthan Global Business Expo at the Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC) in Jaipur, Rajasthan, on 9 December 2024.

- ★ The three-day Summit and Expo will be held from 9 to 11 December 2024 in the state capital, Jaipur, to promote Rajasthan as a progressive and sustainable destination for global investments.
- ★ It is part of the Rajasthan Government's goal of doubling the state's economy to USD 350 billion in the next five years.
- ★ Senior Cabinet Ministers from the central and State Governments, as well as top industrialists, were present.
- ★ The Government of Rajasthan is organising the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024 with the support of the Industry and Commerce Department, Bureau of Investment Promotion (BIP), and RIICO (Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation Limited).
- ★ The nodal body for the Summit is the BIP.
- ★ The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is the Summit Partner.
- ★ The Rising Rajasthan Global Summit 2024 theme is "Replete, Responsible, Ready".
- ★ The event features 12 regional thematic sessions on critical topics such as agri-business innovation, water security, inclusive tourism, sustainable mining, sustainable finance, and women-led startups.

India Launches First TV Channel in Indian Sign Language (ISL)

- ★ Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan unveiled Channel 31, India's first television channel in Indian Sign Language (ISL).
- ★ This significant step is part of the PM-eVidya initiative to create an inclusive educational environment for individuals with hearing disabilities.
- ★ It provides learning materials for school children aligned with central and state curricula.
- ★ It focuses on diverse topics such as Career guidance and skill training, Mental health awareness, Communication skills and promotion of sign language as a subject, equivalent to verbal languages.
- ★ It will be operated by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

LIC's Bima Sakhi Scheme Launched by PM Modi at Panipat, Haryana

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Bima Sakhi scheme of the public-sector insurance company, the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), at Panipat in Haryana on December 9, 2024.
- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that besides creating income opportunities for 2 lakh women, the LIC's Bima Sakshi scheme will help achieve the Government's target of Insurance for All by 2047.
- ★ The Prime Minister announced that his Government was committed to empowering women, and the LIC's Bima Sakhi scheme is a step in that direction.
- ★ Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was also present at the inauguration ceremony.

- ★ The Bima Sakhi scheme is for women, and they will receive training for the first three years to promote financial literacy and awareness about insurance products among people, especially in rural areas.
- ★ These women trainees, called Bima Sakhi, will also receive a stipend in addition to the commission for selling the LIC insurance policies.
- ★ After completing the training, the women can become LIC insurance agents.
- ★ In the scheme's first year, LIC will recruit 2 lakh women.
- ★ Women in the age group 18-70 years are eligible to become Bima Sakhi.
- ★ They should be at least the 10th pass.
- ★ The scheme is not eligible for relatives of existing agents and employees or retired LIC employees.
- ★ If women sell a minimum of 24 policies, they will receive a commission of ₹48,000 (excluding bonus) for the first year.
- ★ The candidates will also get a monthly stipend of ₹7,000 per month.

Pravasi Rajasthani Diwas

- ★ Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma announced that Rajasthan will observe the Pravasi Rajasthani Diwas on 10 December every year.
- ★ The Chief Minister made the announcement at the 'Rajasthan Parvasi Conclave' held in Jaipur on 10 December 20224 as part of the ongoing Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit in Jaipur, Rajasthan.
- ★ The three-day Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit will be held in Jaipur, Rajasthan, from 9 to 11 December.
- ★ It aims to attract Indian and Global investment to the state. At the summit, the Government is organising a separate session focused on the Pravasi Rajasthani Conclave on 10 December and the MSME Conclave on 11 December.
- ★ Addressing the Rajasthan Parvasi Conclave, the Chief Minister announced a series of initiatives to improve the welfare of migrant Rajasthanis and their families.
- ★ The State Government will confer Pravasi Rajasthani Sammelan every year.
- ★ The Government will establish a single point of contact in every district to help the families of Pravasi Rajasthanis in case of any problem.

Tamil Nadu Assembly Passes Resolution Opposing Tungsten Mining in Madurai

- ★ The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution on December 9, 2024, urging the Union Government to cancel the tungsten mining rights granted to Hindustan Zinc Limited in Nayakkarpatti village, Melur taluk, Madurai district.
- ★ The Tamil Nadu Government alleged that the Union Government ignored the State's objections during the auction of mining rights for critical and strategic minerals.
- ★ The proposed mining site in Arittapatti was declared a Biodiversity Heritage Site in 2022.

- ★ The area includes:
 - Historical monuments such as cave temples, Jain temples, Tamil Brahmi scripts, and Panchapandavar beds.
 - Habitat for rare species, making it ecologically and culturally significant.
 - Concerns Raised: Livelihood Impact: Tungsten mining in the region could permanently affect livelihoods and has created anxiety among local residents.
 - Public Protests: The mining project has led to protests by the local population.
- ★ Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin had earlier urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cancel the mining rights.

India to Launch 'One Nation, One Subscription' Initiative for Research Access

- ★ Starting January 1, 2025, around 8 crore students from state-funded higher education institutions (HEIs), including universities and IITs, will gain access to research papers from leading global journals under the Government's 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) initiative.
- ★ The initiative will be co-ordinated by the Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET), an autonomous inter-university center under the University Grants Commission (UGC).
- ★ The Central Government funds the ₹6,000 crore schemes for a three-year period.
- ★ Students and researchers from Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities will gain access, promoting core and interdisciplinary research.
- ★ In the first phase, over 13,400 international journals from renowned publishers like Elsevier, Springer Nature, and Wiley will be available to students, researchers, and faculty.
- ★ Disciplines covered include science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), medicine, social sciences, management, and humanities.

Kerala Tourism Unveils Multilingual Microsite and E-Brochure for Sabarimala

- ★ Kerala Tourism launched a multi-language microsite and e-brochure aimed at providing comprehensive information about the Sabarimala temple.
- ★ The microsite was launched by State Tourism Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas on December 10, 2024.
- ★ The microsite is available in 5 languages: English, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, and Kannada.
- ★ It provides detailed information about the temple's traditions, customs, culture, and geographical insights.
- ★ The site includes short footage with detailed information about the hill shrine.
- ★ The microsite aims to make the pilgrimage easy and simple for pilgrims.
- ★ It includes information about the Sabarimala temple, its customs and traditions, and latest updates.
- ★ Features include a route map, hotel facilities near temples, and a dedicated gallery with hundreds of pictures related to Sabarimala.
- ★ E-Brochure: The e-brochure serves as a virtual travel guide offering essential details for planning the pilgrimage.

- ★ It provides information on places to stay, contact numbers for authorities, and a pilgrim guide that covers customs, traditions, and history of Sabarimala.
- ★ The e-brochure is designed for access on smartphones and can be shared with others.
- ★ The microsite and e-brochure are seen as vital steps in promoting pilgrim tourism.

Google and Andhra Pradesh Join Forces to Propel AI Development

- ★ Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced a landmark partnership between Google and the Andhra Pradesh Government, aimed at fostering artificial intelligence (AI) initiatives in Visakhapatnam.
- ★ This collaboration is set to transform the port city into a global technology and service hub.
- ★ The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was a result of discussions held during IT Minister Nara Lokesh's recent visit to the United States, where he engaged with Google executives.
- ★ The partnership signifies Google's recognition of Visakhapatnam's potential as an emerging tech hub.
- ★ A Google delegation visited Visakhapatnam to assess its infrastructure and resources, expressing optimism about the city's prospects.
- ★ The collaboration is expected to create new job opportunities and elevate Visakhapatnam's strategic importance on the global map.

National Conference of Chief Secretaries

- ★ The 4th annual National Conference of Chief Secretaries commenced in New Delhi on 13 December 2024.
- ★ As per the practice, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair the last two days of the National Conference of Chief Secretaries, i.e. on 14th and 15th December 2024.
- ★ The fourth edition of the National Conference of the Chief Secretaries is in New Delhi from 13-15 December 2024.
- ★ Representatives of the Central Government, Chief Secretaries, and other senior officials of all 28 states, as well as eight Union Territories and domain experts, are participating in the conference.
- ★ The conference's main aim is to encourage participative governance and partnership between the Centre and the State Governments.
- ★ The theme of the 4th National Conference of the Chief Secretaries is: Promoting Entrepreneurship, Employment and Skilling – Leveraging the Demographic Dividend.
- ★ The discussion will be held on the best practices the state/UT Government will follow to benefit from the demographic dividend, especially in the fields of Manufacturing, Rural Non-farm, Services, Renewable Energy, Urban and Circular Economy.

Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) Unveils Five-Year Plan

- ★ The Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) is set to launch an ambitious five-year plan (2025-2029) to modernize India's statistical systems and leverage advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML).
- ★ The ministry plans to integrate AI/ML technologies into statistical processes for better accuracy and data-driven decision-making.
- ★ It also enhanced use of computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) for surveys, ensuring streamlined and efficient data collection.
- ★ MOSPI aims to release survey results within 90 days of completion.
- ★ Monthly unemployment data will be launched by February or March 2025.
- ★ Inflation (CPI) with 2024 as the base year will be introduced by February 2026.
- ★ GDP series with 2022-23 as the same timeline expects the base year.

Maharashtra Set To Achieve \$1 Trillion Economy By 2028-2030

- ★ Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis unveiled ambitious economic plans at the World Hindu Economic Forum (WHEF) 2024, positioning the state to become India's first \$1 trillion economy by 2028-2030.
- ★ The state's GDP is currently ₹42.7 lakh crore (approximately \$500 billion).
- ★ A council has been formed to accelerate the state's economic growth, with input from top CEOs and industry leaders, including Tata Sons Chairman N. Chandrasekaran.
- ★ Maharashtra plays a pivotal role in India's digital economy and is a key player in the nation's transition to a digital-first economy.
- ★ Fadnavis emphasized the need for inclusive development, highlighting Maharashtra's efforts in poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, and renewable energy.
- ★ The state plans to increase its renewable energy share to 52% by 2030.
- ★ Water Conservation and forest cover improvement are key environmental goals.

Government Launches CGS-NPF Scheme

- ★ The Government of India has launched a credit guarantee scheme to enable the farmers to access credit from eligible financial institutions on harvested crops deposited in registered warehouses.
- ★ The Credit Guarantee Scheme for e-NWR-based Pledge Financing (CGS-NPF) was launched by the Central Government in New Delhi on 6 December 2024.
- ★ The Government hopes that the launch of the scheme will boost the post-harvest lending to farmers/trades to ₹5.5 lakh crore in the next 10 years.
- ★ The Credit Guarantee Scheme for e-NWR-based Pledge Financing (CGS-NPF) was launched by the Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and New and Renewable Energy, Pralhad Joshi, in New Delhi.
- ★ The corpus of the CGS-NPF Scheme is ₹1000 crore.

- ★ The CGS-NPF fund will be managed by the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
- ★ The farmers/traders can avail loans from eligible financial institutions against the electronic negotiable warehouse receipts issued by Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA) accredited warehouses.
- ★ The electronic negotiable warehouse receipts will be issued against the agricultural commodities deposited by farmers/traders with Warehouses.
- ★ The Government will counter-guarantee the loan extended by the financial institutions against such electronic negotiable warehouse receipts.

Indore to Criminalise Begging From 1st January 2025

- ★ India's cleanest city, Indore of Madhya Pradesh, will file a first information report (FIR) against a person for giving money and alms to beggars from 1st January 2025.
- ★ The district administration issued the order to criminalise giving alms and money to beggars under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).
- ★ Indore is one of the 10 cities in India where the Government has launched the Bhiksha Vriti Mukta Bharat pilot project.
- ★ The Indore district administration launched a beggar-free campaign in the city in February 2024.
- ★ In the first phase, the beggars caught begging were sent to an ashram in Ujjain, where they were counselled and pledged not to beg again.
- ★ In the second phase of the campaign, the administration has made giving alms and money to beggars a criminal offence from 1st January 2025, invoking section 163 of the BNSS.
- ★ Section 163 of the BNSS is similar to section 144 of the old Indian Penal Code (IPC) where the competent district authorities can issue prohibitory orders in cases of nuisance or apprehended danger.
- ★ People who violate orders issued under Section 163 can be punished by a maximum jail term of six months and a fine of ₹ 1000.

India's First Diabetes Biobank Launched in Chennai

- ★ India has established its first diabetes biobank in Chennai, a collaborative effort between the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation (MDRF).
- ★ This state-of-the-art facility aims to advance diabetes research by collecting, processing, and storing biological samples for in-depth studies into the causes, patterns, and related complications of the disease.
- ★ The biobank will focus on identifying novel biomarkers for early diabetes detection and personalizing treatment strategies.
- ★ Unique diabetes variations in India, including genetic and environmental factors, will be analysed.
- ★ It will support long-term research tracking the progression of diabetes and its complications.

- ★ The facility aims to enhance India's role in the global fight against diabetes, contributing valuable data for collaborative research.

First Ever Tagging of Gangetic Dolphin in Assam Under Project Dolphin

- ★ In a landmark effort in wildlife conservation, a male Gangetic Dolphin has been satellite tagged at Kulsi, a tributary of the Brahmaputra River in Assam.
- ★ It was for the first time in India and the world that the Gangetic River Dolphin was tagged.
- ★ The tagging of India's national aquatic animal, the Gangetic River Dolphin, is part of Project Dolphin of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to track the movement pattern of the highly endangered species.
- ★ The data collected from the tagged dolphin will help conservationists better understand the species' movement range and habitat, which will help them devise a more robust conservation plan.
- ★ The tagging of the dolphin was an initiative of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. It was implemented by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, in collaboration with the Assam Forest Department and Aaranyak, a prominent biodiversity conservation group in Assam.
- ★ The funding for the initiative came from the National CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority).
- ★ Tagging of wildlife animals is one of the most preferred tools amongst wildlife scientists and conservationists to understand the movement and habitat of wildlife animals.

Government Launches ₹1,000 Crore Credit Guarantee Scheme for Small Farmers

- ★ The Government of India, under the leadership of Union Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi, has introduced a ₹1,000 crore Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) to support small and marginal farmers.
- ★ This initiative aims to reduce distress selling by providing farmers access to post-harvest loans.
- ★ Farmers can leverage electronic negotiable warehouse receipts (e-NWRs) as collateral for loans.
- ★ These e-NWRs are issued by Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA)-registered repositories when farmers deposit their produce in certified warehouses.
- ★ The scheme provides a credit guarantee to banks, reducing their lending risk and enabling better access to credit for farmers.
- ★ Aim is to help farmers hold their produce post-harvest, allowing them to sell at better prices rather than resorting to distress sales.
- ★ Farmers gain financial stability by accessing loans based on stored produce, improving their bargaining power.

Mamata Banerjee Launches "Banglar Bari" Scheme

- ★ West Bengal (WB) Chief Minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee launched the "Banglar Bari" scheme to provide houses for the rural poor in the state.

- ★ The scheme was launched ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, as a response to the Centre's failure to release funds for PM Awas Yojana (PMAY).
- ★ 42 beneficiaries across 21 districts received the first installment of funds as part of the launch event.
- ★ A total of ₹1.20 lakh will be given to each eligible family for constructing a house, with ₹60,000 released as the first installment.
- ★ Beneficiaries in certain regions, including Jangalmahal and Darjeeling hills, will receive ₹1.30 lakh.
- ★ The scheme was initiated after 12 lakh beneficiaries in the state were identified as eligible.
- ★ The state conducted a survey identifying over 28 lakh genuine beneficiaries for the Banglar Bari scheme, an increase from the initial 11 lakh identified in the first list.
- ★ In the first phase, ₹60,000 was transferred directly to 12 lakh beneficiaries via their bank accounts.
- ★ The Chief Minister announced that 18 lakh additional beneficiaries will receive their benefits in 2025.
- ★ The State Government will bear the total cost of ₹14,773 crore for the scheme.

Delhi L-G Inaugurates Country's Longest Golf Course in Dwarka

- ★ The inauguration of the country's longest golf course in Dwarka by Lt Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena marks a significant development in sports infrastructure for the national capital.
- ★ LG Saxena emphasized the importance of the Fit India Movement, which has been instrumental in promoting sports across the country and contributing to the success of Indian athletes in international events.
- ★ The 18-hole golf course is located in Sector 24, Dwarka, spanning 7,377 yards and covering 158 acres.
- ★ The project cost is approximately ₹250 crore. It features an automatic irrigation system for water conservation, underground drainage systems, and a storm water recharge well.
- ★ The course aims to boost professional golf training for young golfers.
- ★ Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has developed 17 sports complexes, 2 public golf courses, 17 swimming pools, and 40 multigyms.
- ★ Centres of Excellence are being set up in sports like wrestling, weight lifting, boxing, kabaddi, tennis, shooting, and hockey in Dwarka.
- ★ The golf course will serve as a pay and play facility with tenure playing rights (three to five years).

UP and Manipur Signed MoU for Implementation of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

- ★ Uttar Pradesh and Manipur have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to implement the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme as paired states.
- ★ The agreement between the representatives of both State Governments was signed in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, in December 2024.

- ★ Manipur is the third state in which Uttar Pradesh has signed an MoU under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme. Before Manipur, Uttar Pradesh signed such an MoU with Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya.
- ★ For Manipur, it was the second agreement with a state after a similar MoU with Madhya Pradesh.
- ★ The duration of the MoU between Manipur and Uttar Pradesh is three years from the date of signing. The MoU can be extended for a further three years with the mutual consent of the two states.
- ★ The idea behind the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme is to promote sustained cultural and non-political activities between different regions of the country to understand each other better, strengthening national unity.
- ★ The Government of India has designated the Union Ministry of Education as the Nodal ministry for co-ordinating programmes under the EK Bharat Shreshtha Bharat.

Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025

- ★ The Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 will take place from January 17 to 22 across Delhi NCR, showcasing India's growing prominence in the global mobility landscape.
- ★ With over 1,500 exhibitors and an anticipated 500,000 visitors, the event is poised to become the world's second-largest auto show.
- ★ It will feature leading automotive giants and focus on sustainable and electric mobility technologies.
- ★ Union Minister Piyush Goyal emphasized the expo's alignment with India's vision of becoming a global leader in mobility technologies.
- ★ The event will provide a platform for international collaboration, trade partnerships, and investment opportunities.
- ★ Theme: "Beyond Boundaries: Co-Creating the Future of the Automotive Value Chain", aiming to unite the sector and accelerate India's electric vehicle transition.
- ★ The expo underscores India's commitment to engineering excellence and sustainable development.
- ★ It positions the nation as a key player in the global automotive and mobility ecosystem.

Defence Ministry Launches Rashtraparv Website and Mobile App

- ★ The Union Defence Ministry launched the Rashtraparv Website and Mobile App on 25 December 2024 on the occasion of Good Governance Day.
- ★ Since 2014 the Government of India has observed Good Governance Day on the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
- ★ The Rashtraparv Website and Mobile App was launched by Defence Secretary Rajesh Singh in New Delhi on 25 December 2024.
- ★ The Rashtraparv Website and Mobile App will provide information to the users on;
- ★ Information related to the organisation of national events organised by the ministry like Republic Day, Beating Retreat Ceremony, Independence Day, etc.

- ★ It will also livestream such events, provide a facility to purchase tickets for such events, provide information related to seating arrangements & route maps of events, etc.
- ★ It will host a Tableau Management Portal to facilitate States/UTs and Union Ministries/Departments in designing and finalizing their tableaux for the Republic Day event.

Madhya Pradesh Declared a “Top Global Destination for 2025” by Wall Street Journal

- ★ Madhya Pradesh (MP) has earned a spot on the Wall Street Journal’s list of “Must-Visit Global Destinations for 2025” for its cultural heritage, wildlife, and natural landscapes.
- ★ The state is recognized for its vibrant cultural heritage, including its festivals and historical sites, contributing to its tourism appeal.
- ★ Madhya Pradesh is home to 14 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including 3 permanent and 11 tentative sites.
- ★ Notable UNESCO sites include Khajuraho, Panna, and Bandhavgarh.
- ★ The state boasts 9 tiger reserves, making it a hub for wildlife tourism, particularly for those seeking thrilling wildlife experiences.
- ★ Madhya Pradesh is often referred to as the “Heart of Incredible India” due to its diverse offerings, making it a must-visit destination for travelers seeking adventure, culture, and nature.
- ★ The WSJ recognition highlights Khajuraho (famous for its temples), Panna (known for its wildlife sanctuary), and Bandhavgarh (home to rich wildlife and natural beauty).

Government Launches ‘Udaan Yatri Cafe’ to Address Overpriced Airport Refreshments

- ★ In response to growing concerns over high food and beverage prices at airports, the Indian Government has introduced the ‘Udaan Yatri Cafe’ initiative.
- ★ The pilot project aims to provide affordable refreshments to air travelers, beginning at Kolkata’s Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport.
- ★ This initiative was spurred by Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha, who raised the issue of inflated food prices in airports during the winter session of Parliament.
- ★ Pilot Project Location: Kolkata’s Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport.
- ★ Offerings: Affordable options including water, tea, coffee, and snacks.
- ★ Expansion Plans: If successful, the initiative will be extended to other Airports Authority of India (AAI)-run airports.
- ★ Affordable Air Travel: The project aims to ease the financial burden on passengers by offering budget-friendly food and beverage options.
- ★ Improved Passenger Experience: It strives to improve convenience and accessibility, making air travel more affordable amidst rising aviation costs.

Zero Waste Airport Project at Indore Airport

- ★ IndiGo, through its CSR initiative IndiGoReach, has launched the Zero Waste Airport Project at Indore Airport in collaboration with the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and AAS Foundation, Indore.
- ★ This initiative aims to minimize the environmental impact of airport operations and promote eco-friendly waste management
- ★ The project utilizes the 4R strategy: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Recover.
- ★ Objective is to minimize the environmental impact of airport operations by implementing sustainable waste management practices.
- ★ It emphasizes behavioral change, stakeholder engagement, and training for both airport staff and passengers.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

16th COP of the UNCCD Commences in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

- ★ The 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) commenced in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on 2 December 2024.
- ★ The COP to the UNFCCC is held every two years, and the 15th COP was held in May 2022 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire.
- ★ The UNCCD is one of three global agreements reached at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).
- ★ The 16th Conference of Parties of the UNCCD is being organised by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and is hosted by the Saudi Arabian Government.
- ★ The theme of the 16th COP of the UNCCD is Our Land. Our Future.
- ★ The Indian delegation at the 16th CoP of the UNCCD is being jointly led by the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupendra Yadav and the Chief Minister of Haryana, Nayab Singh Saini.
- ★ The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, organised by the United Nations Environment Programme in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 3-14 June 1992.
- ★ The Convention entered into force on 26 December 1996 and currently has 197 parties.
- ★ The UNCCD aims to stop desertification and land degradation worldwide. Land degradation and increasing desertification are among the major causes of biodiversity destruction and climate change.

2nd India-UK 2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue

- ★ The second India and the United Kingdom 2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue was held in New Delhi on 3 December 2024. The first was held in New Delhi in October 2023, and both countries have agreed to hold their third Dialogue next year in the United Kingdom.
- ★ The 2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue is different from the 2+2 Foreign and Defence Minister Dialogue.
- ★ The 2+2 Foreign and Defence dialogue is a Senior official-level mechanism for discussing and reviewing all aspects of the India-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- ★ The 2+2 Foreign and Defence Minister Dialogue is a ministerial-level discussion just below in importance, the summit-level meeting between the Prime Ministers of India and the United Kingdom.
- ★ During the dialogue, both sides discussed bilateral, regional and international issues.
- ★ They discussed and reviewed all progress made under the India-UK Roadmap 2030 and agreed to revitalise the partnership by identifying new focus areas of collaboration.
- ★ They expressed satisfaction with the progress in launching new key initiatives such as the Technology and Security Initiative, Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership, and the Defence Industrial Roadmap.

India and Kuwait Sign MoU

- ★ India and Kuwait have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a Joint Commission for Cooperation at the Foreign Minister level to strengthen bilateral ties.
- ★ The MoU was signed between both countries during Kuwait's Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al Yahya's visit on 3 and 4 December, 2024.
- ★ This was the first visit to India by Abdullah Ali Al Yahya as Kuwait's Foreign Minister.
- ★ Kuwaiti Foreign Minister also met the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.
- ★ Prime Minister Modi recalled the strong historical ties between the two countries and said that the one million strong Indian communities living in Kuwait are a strong bridge between the people-to-people relationship between the two countries.
- ★ The two countries signed an MoU to establish a Joint Commission for Cooperation at the Foreign Minister level. Under the new MoU, new Joint Working Groups will be established in Education, Investment, Trade, Agriculture, Technology, Security, and Culture.
- ★ The Joint Commission for Cooperation will be an umbrella group that reviews and monitors the relationship between the two countries, and the other Joint Working Groups set up between them, such as those on Hydrocarbons, Health, and Consular matters.

Visa Projects Rapid Growth in Co-Branded Credit Cards in India

- ★ Visa, a global payment network, anticipates robust growth in the co-branded credit card segment in India over the next four years, driven by consumer demand and the e-commerce boom.
- ★ Co-branded credit cards currently represent 12-15% of total credit cards in India (FY24).
- ★ It is expected to surpass 20-25% by FY28, with growth outpacing traditional credit cards.

- ★ Activation rates for co-branded cards are at 70%, compared to 50% for traditional credit cards.
- ★ Transaction volume is 30% higher, and spending per card is 20% higher than regular credit cards.
- ★ The share of co-branded cards in new credit card issuances has risen from 1 in 10 (2018) to 1 in 3 (2023).
- ★ Currently, co-branded cards account for 33% of all new issuances.

UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

- ★ In a historic milestone, India has been elected to chair the 68th Session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) for the first time.
- ★ Ambassador Shambhu S. Kumaran, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Vienna, assumed this esteemed role, marking a significant step in India's leadership on global drug policy issues.
- ★ The CND is a key policy-making body of the UN that focuses on addressing global drug challenges and fostering international collaboration.
- ★ It operates under the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Vienna and is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- ★ Focus Areas for the 68th Session include Combatting Illicit Drug Trafficking, Addressing Substance Abuse, Improving Access for Medical Use and Supporting Inclusive Strategies.

India-UK Collaboration on Electric Propulsion for Indian Navy

- ★ India and the United Kingdom have signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) to co-operate on the design and development of electric propulsion systems for the Indian Navy.
- ★ This agreement, signed in Portsmouth, underscores the growing partnership between the two nations in advancing naval technologies.
- ★ The agreement aims to foster co-design, co-creation, and co-production of advanced electric propulsion capabilities for future naval ships.
- ★ The Indian Navy's Landing Platform Docks are set to feature full-electric propulsion systems.
- ★ These will be constructed at Indian shipyards as part of the initiative to promote indigenous shipbuilding.

3rd India -UK Financial Market Dialogue

- ★ The third India-United Kingdom (UK) Financial Market Dialogue was held at the GIFT (Gujarat International Financial Tech) City on 12 December 2024.
- ★ The annual dialogue between the representatives of the financial sector regulators of both countries discussed ways to collaborate in financial regulations and increase trade and investments between the two countries.
- ★ The Dialogue supported business-to-business links between the two countries and agreed to create the right environment to realise the significant commercial opportunities between these two countries' markets.

- ★ The 3rd India-UK Financial Market Dialogue was attended by the senior officials of the Union Ministry of Finance and the His Majesty Treasury (Ministry of Finance of the UK).
- ★ From the United Kingdom, the representatives of the Bank of England (Central Bank of the UK) and the Financial Conduct Authority attended the meeting.

Switzerland Revokes MFN Status To India Due To Supreme Court Ruling

- ★ Switzerland has suspended the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause in the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with India.
- ★ Effective from January 1, 2025, Indian companies operating in Switzerland will face a higher tax rate of 10% on dividends, up from the earlier 5%.
- ★ The decision follows a 2023 Supreme Court of India ruling that the MFN clause does not automatically apply when a country joins the OECD unless a notification under Section 90 of the Income Tax Act is issued.
- ★ Indian goods and services may face higher tariffs, additional trade barriers, and reduced access to the Swiss market.
- ★ Key sectors impacted: IT, pharmaceuticals, financial services, and engineering goods.
- ★ Think-tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) termed it a setback for Indian firms operating in Switzerland.
- ★ Switzerland is a major trading partner within the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).
- ★ India and Switzerland signed the DTAA treaty on 2nd November 1994, which was amended in 2000 and 2010.
- ★ Under DTAA, if a company of India is operating in Switzerland and has earned income on its investment in Switzerland, then the income will be taxed either in India or Switzerland as per the DTAA agreement. Similarly is the case of the investment of Switzerland's company in India.

India Moldova signs Migration and Mobility Partnership Pact

- ★ The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Moldova, Mihail Popsoi, were on an official visit to India on 15-16 December 2024.
- ★ During his visit, India and Moldova signed three agreements, including a Migration and Mobility Partnership agreement, to strengthen the bilateral ties.
- ★ During the visit of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Moldova, Mihail Popsoi, to India, three agreements were signed between the two countries.
 - Declaration of Intent on a Migration and Mobility Partnership.
 - Moldova signed a Framework Agreement to join the International Solar Alliance.
 - Memorandum of Understanding between the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, Ministry of External Affairs of India, and the Diplomatic Institute, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, to enhance co-operation in diplomatic training.

11th D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Meeting held in Egypt

- ★ The 11th summit meeting of the Developing Eight (D-8) Organizations for Economic Cooperation was held in the New Administrative Capital of Egypt on 19 December 2024. The New Administrative Capital of Egypt is being built on the outskirts of the present capital city of Cairo, and it is intended to be the new capital of Egypt.
- ★ The 10th summit meeting of D-8 countries was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 8th April 2021.
- ★ Egypt assumed the rotating presidency of the D-8 groups from Bangladesh.
- ★ Indonesia will host the 12th D-8 summit meeting in 2025.
- ★ D-8 is a group of eight Islamic countries
- ★ The theme of the 11th D-8 Summit meeting was “Investing in Youth and Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises: Towards Shaping the Economy of Tomorrow”.
- ★ The D-8 Summit Meeting was attended by the leaders of the eight-member countries and other leaders, notably.
- ★ The D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation is a multilateral forum of 8 Islamic countries – Egypt, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Iran, Pakistan and Turkiye.
- ★ The D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation was formed to further economic co-operation amongst the member states so as to improve member states’ position in the global economy and also to enhance participation in decision-making at the international level.
- ★ It also aims to diversify and create new opportunities in trade relations amongst the member countries and improve the standards of living of their citizens.

UN Designates 21st of December as World Meditation Day

- ★ The world will observe 21st December 2024 as the first World Meditation Day.
- ★ The United Nations designated 21st December as World Meditation Day in a resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly on 29 November 2024.
- ★ As part of World Meditation Day, a special programme was organised by the Permanent Mission of India at the United Nations headquarters in New York, the United States of America, on 20 December 2024.
- ★ Renowned Indian spiritual leader and founder of the Art of Living Foundation, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, was the Chief Guest at the special programme, and he conducted a live, global meditation session.
- ★ The initiative to declare 21st December as World Meditation Day was led by India in the United Nations. The resolution in the United Nations General Assembly was co-sponsored by India.
- ★ The United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution, accepting that meditation played a positive role in the health and well-being of an individual.
- ★ The celebration of the day seeks to raise awareness about the benefits of meditation around the world.
- ★ The theme of the first World Mediation Day is “Inner Peace, Global Harmony”.

China and Nepal Initiate Global Dialogue Series

- ★ Nepal and China Governments launched the “Phewa Dialogue” series in a collaborative effort to formulate regional prosperity and peace policies.
- ★ The dialogue is named after the famous Phewa Lake in Pokhara, Nepal, where the two-day event is being held.
- ★ The dialogue was inaugurated by former President Bidya Devi Bhandari of Nepal.
- ★ The event is being hosted by Sichuan University’s China Center for South Asian Studies and Tribhuvan University’s Department of International Relations and Diplomacy.
- ★ The dialogue will focus on issues like South Asia’s global industrial shift and regional needs.
- ★ The K.P. Sharma Oli Government had planned to start the Sagarmatha Dialogue series, inspired by the Raisina Dialogue, which was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

India and France Partner to Develop the Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum

- ★ The Ministry of Culture has announced a landmark partnership with France Museums Development (FMD) to develop the Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum as a world-class cultural institution.
- ★ This project is part of the Central Vista Redevelopment Project and will cover 1,55,000 square meters across the iconic North and South Blocks in New Delhi.
- ★ The Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum (YYBNM) will celebrate India’s unbroken civilizational history.
- ★ The project was first announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the International Museum Expo in May 2023 and reiterated during the Bharat Mandapam inauguration in July 2023.
- ★ This collaboration builds on the cultural co-operation between India and France, with France’s museum development expertise playing a key role.
- ★ The project emphasizes India’s commitment to sustainable development and adaptive reuse, blending the country’s rich cultural heritage with modern design and functionality.

Moldova Joins ISA by Signing Framework Agreement to Boost Renewable Energy

- ★ Moldova has officially signed the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement, reinforcing its commitment to promoting renewable energy.
- ★ The ISA was conceptualized during COP21 in Paris in 2015 as a collaborative initiative between India and France.
- ★ The ISA is headquartered in Gurugram, India.
- ★ The mission of the ISA is to unite global efforts in combating climate change through the implementation of solar energy solutions.
- ★ The ISA currently has 104 member countries and 16 signatory countries.
- ★ The ISA Framework Agreement came into force in 2017, and following its amendment in 2020, all United Nations member states became eligible to join the ISA.

Tanzania to Be Partner Country for International Gita Mahotsav in Kurukshetra

- ★ Tanzania will be the partner country for the International Gita Mahotsav held from November 28 to December 15 in Kurukshetra.
- ★ Tanzania also participated as a partner country in the International Surajkund Crafts Fair held in February.
- ★ The International Gita Mahotsav will help enhance the partnership between India and Tanzania.
- ★ Tanzanian ministers are expected to participate in the event.
- ★ The International Gita Mahotsav is a cultural event celebrating the Bhagavad Gita, along with Indian culture, spirituality, and heritage.
- ★ The 2024 International Gita Mahotsav will be held in Kurukshetra, Haryana, from November 28 to December 15.

India, Brazil, South Africa Collaborate to Leverage Digital Public Infrastructure, AI, and Data for Governance

- ★ Leaders from the G20 Troika — India, Brazil, and South Africa unveiled a landmark joint declaration focused on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and data for governance.
- ★ The declaration was made amidst global economic growth at just over 3%, the lowest rate since the turn of the century.
- ★ The declaration emphasizes the transformative power of technology to address global inequality and accelerate progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- ★ The declaration proposes that digital systems should follow key foundational principles to ensure inclusivity and adaptability: Open, Modular, Interoperable and Scalable.
- ★ These principles are aimed at making digital systems flexible and adaptable to evolving national needs.

India Concerned as China to Construct World's Largest Dam in Tibet

- ★ The Chinese Government has given its green signal to the construction of the world's largest dam on the river Yarlung Zangbo/Tsangpo (known as the Brahmaputra in India) on the eastern rim of the Tibetan plateau.
- ★ The project has raised concerns among environmentalists as it will lead to the displacement of millions of people and the destruction of the natural ecosystem in Tibet.
- ★ It could seriously affect millions of people downstream in India and Bangladesh.
- ★ The construction of a dam on the Yarlung Zangbo River was announced by China in 2020.
- ★ It will be the world's largest dam in the world overtaking the Three Gorges Dam built on the Yangtze River in China.
- ★ The total investment in the dam is over 1 trillion yuan (US\$137 billion), making it the single largest infrastructure project in the world.
- ★ The project is expected to generate nearly 300 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually which is expected to meet the electricity needs of 30 crore people per year.

- ★ Currently, the world's largest installed hydel power capacity is the Three Gorges Dam which was designed to produce 88.2 billion kWh.

Malaysia Extends Visa Exemption for Indian Tourists Until 2026

- ★ Malaysia has extended its 30-day visa exemption for Indian nationals until December 31, 2026, as part of efforts to enhance bilateral ties and boost tourism.
- ★ This initiative is part of Malaysia's Visa Liberalisation Plan aimed at promoting economic and tourism growth, especially in anticipation of Visit Malaysia Year 2026 and Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship in 2025.
- ★ Indian nationals can stay in Malaysia for up to 30 days by presenting:
 - A return flight ticket
 - Proof of sufficient funds (bank statement or credit cards) upon arrival.
- ★ Over 735,000 Indian arrivals were recorded in 2019 before the pandemic.
- ★ Malaysia saw over 1 million Indian tourists in 2024, with 1,009,114 Indian tourist arrivals recorded from January to November 2024.
- ★ This marks a 47% increase over 2019 and a 71.7% rise over 2023.
- ★ The visa exemption is expected to further drive tourism growth, contributing significantly to Malaysia's tourism industry and economic recovery post-pandemic.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Skylark Teams Up with Fortinet to Launch Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence

- ★ Skylark Information Technologies partnered with Fortinet to establish India's first Operational Technology (OT) Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Chennai.
- ★ The CoE aims to provide advanced security solutions specifically tailored for OT environments, supporting industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, utilities, and critical infrastructure like power, oil and gas, and transportation.
- ★ The lab will support digital transformation across various industries, addressing cybersecurity challenges arising from the integration of OT and IT systems.
- ★ The CoE will offer a hands-on lab environment where OT customers can simulate real-world use cases and develop cybersecurity solutions.
- ★ It provides a platform to explore integrated cybersecurity measures, reducing complexities in OT security and helping enhance digital transformation efficiency.
- ★ Skylark's initiative to open an OT security CoE reflects a commitment to protecting industrial operations and critical infrastructure from cyber threats.
- ★ The facility allows customers to experience Fortinet's OT security platform, enabling better management and enhanced security for OT environments.

CCI Initiates Investigation into Google for Alleged Anti-Competitive Practices

- ★ The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has initiated a detailed investigation against Google LLC and its affiliates for alleged abuse of dominant position in the real money gaming (RMG) ecosystem.
- ★ The investigation was prompted by a complaint from Winzo Games Private Limited, accusing Google of discriminatory practices that disadvantage other gaming app developers.
- ★ Winzo alleged that Google's 2022 pilot program on the Play Store exclusively allowed Daily Fantasy Sports (DFS) and Rummy apps, sidelining other RMG apps.
- ★ Google's actions allegedly created unfair competition, provided undue advantages to select competitors, and hindered the growth of other RMG platforms.
- ★ The CCI observed that prolonged pilot programs and non-transparent policy enforcement by Google could indicate anti-competitive practices.

Hyundai Motor Group Forms Strategic Partnership with IITs

- ★ South Korea's Hyundai Motor Group has announced a strategic partnership with three premier Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) to establish a robust research framework in battery technology and electrification.
- ★ The initiative aims to develop innovations tailored to the unique requirements of the Indian market.
- ★ Collaborating Institutes include IIT Delhi, IIT Bombay, and IIT Madras.
- ★ Objective is to establish a strong research framework in battery technology and electrification, tailored to India's needs.

ISRO Successfully Launch ESA Probe 3 Spacecraft Using PSLV C-59 Rocket

- ★ The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the European Space Agency (ESA) Probe 3 Spacecraft from the First Launch Pad, Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC-SHAR), Sriharikota Andhra Pradesh, on 5 December 2024.
- ★ The ESA Probe 3 was launched onboard ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) C-59.
- ★ The mission was to be launched on 4 December 2024, but it was postponed to 5 December 2024 due to technical issues.
- ★ It was NewSpace India Limited's (NSIL) second successful mission in a fortnight after the launch of the GSAT-20/ GSAT-N2 satellite aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket.
- ★ ISRO undertook the mission for NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), which entered into a contract with the ESA to launch the Europa Probe 3 spacecraft using the PSLV rocket.
- ★ The ESA Probe 3 spacecraft is a technology demonstrator of the ESA.
- ★ The spacecraft has two satellites.
- ★ It is the world's first precision formation-flying mission in which a pair of satellites will fly together, maintaining a fixed configuration as if they were a single large rigid structure in space.
- ★ The satellites will study the Sun's corona, the Sun's outermost atmosphere.

Google Inks Pact to Set Up A Safety Engineering Centre in Hyderabad

- ★ The Google Safety Engineering Centre (GSEC) will be established in Hyderabad, marking the first of its kind in the APAC region, after Tokyo, and only the fifth in the world, with similar facilities in Dublin, Munich, and Malaga.
- ★ The announcement was made at the Google for India 2024
- ★ The agreement was finalized in the presence of Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and IT Minister D Sridhar Babu.
- ★ The GSEC will serve as a specialized international cybersecurity hub, focusing on developing AI-driven security solutions and advanced safety products tailored for India.
- ★ It will also provide a collaborative platform for cybersecurity experts and researchers.
- ★ In addition, the centre will contribute to skill development, create employment opportunities, and enhance cybersecurity capabilities in India.
- ★ Hyderabad, which already hosts Google's largest employee base in India, is also home to Google's largest office outside its headquarters.

Power Grid Partners with IIT Roorkee

- ★ Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (PGCIL) has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with IIT Roorkee for a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative valued at 20.73 crore.
- ★ The collaboration aims to foster technological innovation by setting up three state-of-the-art Centres of Excellence (CoEs) at the Institute's Computer Centre.
- ★ Centres of Excellence (CoEs) include Command-and-Control Centre for campus UHS networks, IoT Research & Application Centre for advanced studies in the Internet of Things and Cyber Security and Mobile Security Lab for hackathons and awareness initiatives.
- ★ These CoEs will support cutting-edge research and development and benefit approximately 11,000 students on campus and beyond.
- ★ The CoEs will enhance the institution's technological capabilities and reinforce its commitment to innovation and higher education.

Indian Institute of Spices Research Introduces Surasa

- ★ IISR Surasa is a new ginger variety developed by the ICAR – Indian Institute of Spices Research (IISR) through a farmers participatory breeding programme.
- ★ The original rhizome of Surasa was discovered in Kodancherry, Kozhikode by farmer John Joseph.
- ★ The research and development took over six years of testing and trials in various regions.
- ★ It has excellent organoleptic properties, making it more palatable when consumed.
- ★ It is the first ginger variety in India developed exclusively for use as a vegetable.
- ★ The variety is approved by the Kerala State Varietal Release Committee for cultivation in Kerala.

IIT Madras Unveils World's Most Detailed 3D High-Resolution Images

- ★ Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) became the first research organization globally to release the most detailed 3D high-resolution images of the fetal brain.
- ★ A total of 5,132 brain sections were captured digitally using advanced brain mapping technology developed by the Sudha Gopalakrishnan Brain Centre at IIT Madras.
- ★ The data offers 0.5-micron accuracy and allows analysis at the cellular level.
- ★ This accomplishment highlights the potential of Indian R&D to produce world-class science and technology and demonstrates the success of the public-private-philanthropy partnership model.
- ★ The project focused on five fetal brains in the second trimester, specifically between 14 and 24 weeks.
- ★ The dataset generated provides significant insights into neurodevelopmental disorders and advances in fetal medicine.
- ★ The release of the dataset, named DHARANI, is a significant advancement in human neuroscience research and is the largest publicly accessible digital dataset of the human fetal brain, enhancing current knowledge by 20X.

AIIMS Delhi Partners with Wipro GE Healthcare

- ★ The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, has signed an MoU with Wipro GE Healthcare to establish an AI Health Innovations Hub, marking a major step in leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) for healthcare advancements.
- ★ Wipro GE Healthcare will contribute \$1 million over five years to co-develop and test AI-enabled systems and solutions.
- ★ A dedicated working committee from both organizations will oversee research, development, and academic engagement.
- ★ AI is projected to significantly boost India's healthcare sector, with an estimated contribution of \$25–30 billion to the GDP.

Google Partners with NCERT

- ★ Tech giant Google announced a partnership with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to bring quality education to far corners of India.
- ★ As part of the partnership, NCERT will launch multiple YouTube channels that are aligned to the curriculum of grades 1 to 12, over the coming months.
- ★ The channels, covering 29 Indian languages, including Indian Sign Language, will offer educational content in engaging and accessible formats, empowering students, parents, and teachers across the country.
- ★ In addition, Google also announced collaboration with the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning to roll out Credentialed Courses.
- ★ This will be available through the NPTEL-SWAYAM website. Notably, the website is operated by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the NPTEL.

- ★ NPTEL now offers 50 credentialed courses on a diverse range of subjects, from pure sciences and literature to sports psychology and rocket propulsion.

China Launches First Atmospheric Monitoring Station in Antarctica

- ★ China's first atmospheric monitoring station in Antarctica, the Zhongshan National Atmospheric Background Station, began operations.
- ★ It aims to monitor climate changes in Antarctica and support the global response to climate change.
- ★ This station is China's ninth operational atmospheric monitoring station, marking its first overseas monitoring station.
- ★ China is also testing 10 new atmospheric monitoring stations within its own borders.
- ★ The station will continuously observe atmospheric component concentration changes in Antarctica, contributing to long-term data collection.
- ★ There are 70 permanent research stations in Antarctica from 29 countries, highlighting the global interest in climate and environmental monitoring.

ISRO to Investigate Crop Growth in Space with PSLV C60 Mission

- ★ Of the total 24 PS4-Orbital Experiment Module (POEM-4) payloads which will be flown onboard the PSLV-C60 SpaDeX mission, 4 have been developed by Karnataka-based academia and start-ups.
- ★ The PSLV-C60 SpaDeX mission is likely to be launched by ISRO by the end of this month from Sriharikota.
- ★ RVSat-1 Payload: Developed by R.V. College of Engineering, Bengaluru. It will conduct a microbiological experiment on Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron under microgravity conditions to aid in astronaut health and develop antibiotics.
- ★ BGS ARPIT (Amateur Radio Payload for Information Transmission) Payload: Developed by SJC Institute of Technology, Chickballapur. It is an amateur radio transmitter that communicates using FM modulation and the VHF band.
- ★ RUDRA 1.0 HPGP: Developed by Bellatrix Aerospace. It aims to demonstrate a high-performance green propulsion system.
- ★ GLX-SQ Payload: Developed by GalaxEye Space Solutions. It will demonstrate the generation, capture, and processing of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) images in space.
- ★ The mission is designed to advance various space technologies such as green propulsion, space debris capture, and space-based SAR monitoring.
- ★ It will contribute to ISRO's mission to demonstrate space docking technologies and grow space-based plant systems.
- ★ PSLV-C60 Mission Goals: The PSLV-C60 mission will also place two satellites, 'Chaser and Target', to demonstrate space docking technologies essential for India's future space station.

Indian Space Research Organisation and European Space Agency

- ★ Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the European Space Agency (ESA) have signed an agreement to collaborate on astronaut training, mission implementation, and research experiments.
- ★ The agreement was signed by ISRO Chairman Somanath and ESA Director General Dr. Josef Aschbacher.
- ★ The co-operation will focus on astronaut training, experiment development and integration (including the use of ESA facilities on the International Space Station), human and biomedical research experiments, and joint educational outreach initiatives.
- ★ For the Axiom-4 mission, ISRO's Gaganyatri and an ESA astronaut will be part of the crew.
- ★ The agencies are collaborating to implement experiments proposed by Indian Principal Investigators for the ISS.
- ★ ISRO and ESA are working on human physiological studies, technology demonstration experiments, and joint educational outreach activities.
- ★ ISRO's roadmap for human spaceflight activities includes the development of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), which offers opportunities to develop interoperability between human spaceflight platforms.

IoTech Develops Technology To Directly Spray Seeds

- ★ IoTechWorld Avigation, one of India's largest drone manufacturers, has developed a process to directly spray and sow seeds for crops like paddy, chilli, and vegetables, making farming more efficient.
- ★ The process of broadcasting seeds for crops like paddy has been successful, with results equivalent to traditional farming methods, improving germination rates and yields.
- ★ The company's drones are multi-purpose, acting like tractors.
- ★ They can spray agro-chemicals and broadcast granules (e.g., urea, seeds), which increases the number of operational days for drones on fields.
- ★ IoTech drones are equipped with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) features, such as collision avoidance, obstacle detection, and automatic rerouting.
- ★ The drones send data to the cloud for real-time analysis.
- ★ The company provides direct support to farmers through this data, helping them improve drone usage and farm management.
- ★ IoTech has tied up with State Bank of India and Punjab National Bank to provide loans for drone purchases, including up to 90% financing under the Agri Infrastructure Fund with a 6% effective interest rate.
- ★ The company also runs a remote pilot training organization to train drone operators.

BANKING, FINANCE & ECONOMICS

\$98 Million ADB Loan for Governments Building India's Clean Plant Programme

- ★ The Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) will provide a \$98 million loan to the Government of India to support its Building India's Clean Plant Programme.
- ★ The Indian Government's Clean Plant Programme aims to improve horticulture crop farmers' access to certified disease-free planting materials across India.
- ★ This initiative is expected to improve the long-term yields, quality, and climate resilience of horticulture crops in India. This will improve farmers' incomes and boost the horticulture sector in the country.
- ★ The Government of India and the ADB representative in India signed an agreement for this purpose on 29 November 2024 in New Delhi.
- ★ The ADB loan will start the Central Government's Building India's Clean Plant Programme.
- ★ The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare will implement the Building India's Clean Plant Programme through the National Horticulture Board and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.
- ★ The Programme aims to enhance plant management in the country by providing horticulture farmers with access to certified disease-free planting materials.
- ★ The loan amount will be used to target crops like almonds, apples, avocados, berries, citrus, grapes, guava, litchi, mango, pomegranate, and walnuts.
- ★ The Government will establish dedicated clean plant centres to maintain disease-free foundation materials that accredited nurseries will later propagate.
- ★ The Government will provide licences to private and public nurseries to whom the dedicated clean plant centres will supply the disease-free foundation materials.

Groww Mutual Fund Launches Multicap Fund

- ★ Groww Mutual Fund has introduced Groww Multicap Fund, an open-ended equity scheme aiming to capture growth across large, mid, and smallcap stocks.
- ★ The New Fund Offer (NFO) is open for subscription and will close on December 10, 2024.
- ★ The scheme will reopen on or before December 24, 2024.
- ★ The aim is to achieve long-term capital appreciation by predominantly investing in equity and equity-related instruments across large-cap, mid-cap, and small-cap companies.
- ★ The scheme is benchmarked against the Nifty 500 Multicap 50:25:25 Index TRI.
- ★ The fund is managed by Anupam Tiwari.
- ★ The fund is suitable for investors seeking investments in equity across market capitalizations for long-term capital growth.

Reserve Bank of India Allocates ₹3,497 Crore of Green Bond Auction to PDs

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) devolved ₹3,497 crore of the Sovereign Green Bond (SGrB) auction on Primary Dealers (PDs).
- ★ This occurred due to limited investor interest and low bids at the auction.
- ★ In May, the RBI cancelled a Sovereign Green Bond auction due to insufficient demand.
- ★ In the August auction, the RBI accepted only ₹1,697 crore out of the ₹6,000 crore initially notified, indicating low participation.
- ★ The notified amount for the recent SGrB auction was ₹5,000 crore.
- ★ The RBI received 73 competitive bids aggregating ₹9,630 crore and four non-competitive bids amounting to ₹2 crore.
- ★ The RBI accepted all non-competitive bids and only nine competitive bids totalling ₹1,500 crore.
- ★ The remaining amount of ₹3,497 crore was devolved on Primary Dealers (PDs).
- ★ PDs are intermediaries that provide liquidity in the secondary market and act as underwriters at Government Security (G-Sec) auctions.
- ★ They absorb the devolved amount when investor demand is insufficient.
- ★ The cut-off yield at the auction was 6.79%, which is the interest rate at which the bonds were sold.

Finance Ministry Reports India's \$2 Billion Contribution to BRICS Bank

- ★ India has contributed nearly \$2 billion to the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB).
- ★ The contribution was paid in seven instalments from the fiscal year 2015-16 to 2021-22.
- ★ 20 externally aided projects are currently underway in India, funded by the NDB, with a total loan amount of \$4,867 million.
- ★ These projects focus on sectors such as transportation, water conservation, food management, and connectivity in rural areas.
- ★ In response to a Lok Sabha query, the Finance Ministry clarified India's stance on a joint currency for BRICS nations.
- ★ The report prepared by Russia during its BRICS chairmanship in 2024 highlighted that BRICS does not aim to replace the US dollar but rather to offer a viable alternative to improve global economic efficiency and promote inclusive globalization.
- ★ Despite the rise in alternatives, the US dollar remains dominant in global trade, accounting for over 90% of transactions.
- ★ Other major currencies like the Euro, Japanese Yen, and British Pound also play significant roles in international trade.
- ★ The BRICS report highlighted challenges with current cross-border payments infrastructure, particularly its lack of competition and reliance on centralized settlement mechanisms.

PhonePe Ends Partnership with Juspay

- ★ PhonePe, a Walmart-backed digital payments platform, has ended its partnership with Juspay, a payment orchestration platform, and decided to integrate with merchants directly.
- ★ A payment aggregator provides payment platform services allowing merchants to accept various payment methods like debit/credit cards, UPI, wallets, and bank transfers.
- ★ A payment orchestrator routes transactions through the most successful aggregator platform, optimizing payment processing.
- ★ Juspay, which accounted for 15% of PhonePe's payment gateway volume, may face a reduction in its business if other platforms follow PhonePe's approach of direct integration.
- ★ Juspay is backed by Softbank, which could influence the competition in the payment aggregation space.

Muthoot Microfin Begins Co-Lending Loan Disbursals in Partnership with State Bank of India

- ★ Muthoot Microfin, a Kochi-based microfinance institution, has started loan disbursements under its co-lending partnership with the State Bank of India (SBI).
- ★ SBI has sanctioned a total limit of ₹500 crore for this partnership, to be disbursed in tranches of ₹100 crore.
- ★ Loans ranging from ₹50,000 to ₹3 lakh will be provided to identified and eligible customers.
- ★ The focus is on members of Joint Liability Groups (JLGs), primarily involved in agriculture, allied activities, and other income-generating ventures.
- ★ Muthoot Microfin operates in 20 states and plans to expand this initiative pan-India to improve access to credit for rural entrepreneurs.

State Bank of India Introduces Affordable Customized Vehicle Loan for Uber Fleet Partners

- ★ The State Bank of India (SBI) has introduced a customized vehicle loan product exclusively for Uber's fleet partners.
- ★ The product offers low-cost, tailored financing solutions and ensures hassle-free loan disbursement to fleet partners.
- ★ The partnership between SBI and Uber combines SBI's extensive financial services network with Uber's technology platform.
- ★ The initiative aims to help fleet partners expand their fleet and scale up operations, contributing to the growth of the ride-hailing industry.
- ★ SBI holds a 2% market share in auto loans across India, reinforcing its leadership in vehicle financing.

Bank of India to Issue Additional ₹5,000 Crore in Infrastructure Bonds

- ★ Bank of India (BoI) plans to raise an additional ₹5,000 crore through the issuance of infrastructure bonds.

- ★ The bond issuance is in line with the current soft interest rate trends.
- ★ In November 2024, BoI raised ₹ 5,000 crore through a 10-year infrastructure bond with a coupon rate of 7.41%.
- ★ Earlier in July 2024, the bank raised another ₹ 5,000 crore through a similar bond offering, but at a slightly higher coupon rate of 7.54%.
- ★ In total, BoI has raised ₹ 10,000 crore in two tranches of infrastructure bonds.
- ★ Infrastructure bonds are exempt from regulatory reserve requirements such as the Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) and Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR), making them particularly attractive for banks.
- ★ Commercial banks are expected to raise over ₹ 1 trillion through infrastructure bonds in FY25, nearly doubling the amount raised in FY24.

RBI Imposes ₹5 Lakh Monetary Penalty on The Panchkula Central Co-operative Bank Limited

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposed a monetary penalty of ₹5.00 lakh on The Panchkula Central Co-operative Bank Limited, Haryana.
- ★ The penalty was for the contravention of provisions under Section 26A read with Section 56 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 (BR Act).
- ★ The RBI exercised its powers under Section 47A(1)(c) read with Sections 46(4)(i) and 56 of the BR Act to impose the penalty.
- ★ The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) conducted the statutory inspection of the bank, examining its financial position as of March 31, 2023.
- ★ After considering the bank's reply and oral submissions made during the personal hearing, the RBI sustained the charge of failure to transfer eligible unclaimed amounts to the Depositor Education and Awareness Fund (DEAF) within the prescribed time.

Sa-Dhan and Indian Institute of Banking and Finance Collaborate to Launch Certification Course

- ★ Sa-Dhan, a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recognised Self-Regulatory Organization (SRO) for microfinance and impact finance institutions, has partnered with the Indian Institute of Banking & Finance (IIBF), country's premier institute for administering various courses in the banking sector, to launch a new certification course for microfinance professionals.
- ★ The course aims to train new employees of microfinance institutions and offer career opportunities for those interested in joining the microfinance industry.
- ★ The course has been developed jointly with Sa-Dhan, the largest and oldest association and an SRO for microfinance institutions.

\$50 Million ADB Loan for Meghalaya's Water Harvesting Project

- ★ Asian Development Bank (ADB) has agreed to provide a \$50 million loan to finance the setting up of a water harvesting system in Meghalaya and enhance water security in the state.

- ★ An agreement for this purpose was signed between India's Government and the ADB representative in New Delhi on 5 December 2024.
- ★ The Meghalaya Government will use the loan amount to finance the state's Climate-Adaptative Community-Based Water Harvesting Project.
- ★ Under the project, a water harvesting system will be constructed on demand of the community.
- ★ 532 small water-storage facilities will be constructed in 12 districts of the state.
- ★ It will finance the construction of three micro-hydro power plants in the water harvesting system.
- ★ It will develop 3,000 hectares of command area to provide assured irrigation facilities for the farmers in the lean rabi season.
- ★ It will establish 50 weather stations in the Garo, Jaintia, and Khasi regions, for gathering data on climate and for monitoring micro-irrigation systems.
- ★ It will also establish an institutional mechanism for community ownership and integrated management of natural resources through village employment councils, watershed management committees, and water users' associations.

RBI Raises UPI Lite Wallet Limit to ₹5,000

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) enhanced the per-transaction and wallet limits for transactions made on UPI Lite to ₹ 1,000 and ₹ 5,000,
- ★ Earlier, the per-transaction limit and wallet limit for transactions made through Unified Payments Interface (UPI) Lite were set at ₹ 500 and ₹ 2,000,
- ★ The increase in limits aims to encourage the wider adoption of UPI Lite and facilitate more small-value digital payments in offline mode.
- ★ UPI Lite allows for low-value transactions without requiring a UPI PIN and does not rely on the remitter bank's core banking system, enabling faster processing.
- ★ RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das announced the limit increase in his October 2024 monetary policy speech.
- ★ In addition to UPI Lite, the UPI123 Pay transaction limit was also increased from ₹ 5,000 to ₹ 10,000.
- ★ The limit enhancements reflect the growing use and adoption of UPI, as well as the expanding use cases for UPI transactions in India.
- ★ UPI has processed a cumulative total of 155.44 billion transactions in 2024, demonstrating the platform's growing popularity.

Bajaj Finserv AMC Introduces Bajaj Finserv Healthcare Fund

- ★ Bajaj Finserv AMC has launched the Bajaj Finserv Healthcare Fund, an open-ended equity scheme aimed at long-term growth.
- ★ The New Fund Offer (NFO) opens for subscription on December 6, 2024, and closes on December 20, 2024.
- ★ The fund focuses on companies in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors, including pharmaceuticals, hospitals, diagnostics, and wellness.

- ★ It will invest at least 80% of its assets in companies from sectors covered by the BSE Healthcare Total Return Index (TRI).
- ★ The fund taps into the growing Indian healthcare sector, driven by factors like changing demographics, rising healthcare spending, and technological innovations.

Federal Bank Launches Esteem Savings Account

- ★ Federal Bank has launched Esteem Savings Account, setting a new standard in personalised banking experiences.
- ★ This premium banking solution reflects Federal Bank's commitment to providing tailored financial services for customers aged 55 and above, addressing their diverse needs.
- ★ The account includes free yearly health check-ups, hospital cash facility, and doctor-on-call services.
- ★ Customers are eligible for two complimentary airport lounge accesses per quarter.
- ★ Special discounts given for health, utilities, elder care services, and more.
- ★ The account includes one complimentary zero balance accounts for the spouse and two zero balance accounts for grandchildren.
- ★ ZERO charges on 10 commonly used banking services, including Debit Card Issuance, Debit Card AMC, NEFT, RTGS, Duplicate Passbook, and others.
- ★ A 25% discount on locker rent and waiver of AMC for the first year of demat account opening.

Reserve Bank of India Keeps Repo Rate Unchanged at 6.5%

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at 6.5% for the 11th consecutive time since February 2023.
- ★ The decision was made during the meeting held between December 4-6, 2024 with the vote split 4:2.
- ★ Despite calls for a rate cut, the RBI is focused on balancing inflation control with economic growth. Governor
- ★ Shaktikanta Das emphasized the importance of durable price stability for sustained growth.
- ★ The Standing Deposit Facility (SDF) rate remains at 6.25%.
- ★ Marginal Standing Facility (MSF) rate and bank rate remain at 6.75%.
- ★ The RBI MPC decided to maintain a 'neutral' stance, with four members voting to keep the stance unchanged.
- ★ The goal is to align inflation with the 4% target while supporting economic growth.

SEBI Imposes ₹9 Lakh Fine on Reliance Securities

- ★ Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) imposed a ₹9 lakh fine on Reliance Securities for breaching market norms and stock broker rules.

- ★ The penalty followed a thematic onsite inspection conducted by Sebi, along with exchanges (NSE and BSE), of the books of accounts, records, and other documents of Reliance Securities' authorized persons (APs).
- ★ The inspection covered the period from April 2022 to December 2023 to verify compliance with stock broker rules, NSEIL Capital Market regulations, and NSE Future and Options trading norms.
- ★ RSL failed to maintain adequate records of client order placements, particularly for offline clients.
- ★ There were issues with unauthorized personnel operating trading terminals.
- ★ Offices of RSL's APs were shared with those of other brokers, violating segregation norms.
- ★ The inspection found that RSL did not maintain order placement records for clients linked to its APs, which is required for transparency and prevention of unauthorized trades.
- ★ RSL's APs were found to be operating unapproved terminals, breaching rules that require terminals to be handled only by approved users.

World Bank Sanctions \$188 Million Loan to Maharashtra

- ★ The World Bank approved a \$188.28 million loan for Maharashtra aimed at boosting economic growth, focusing on underdeveloped districts.
- ★ The program aims to enhance district-level planning and development strategies by providing critical resources such as data, funding, and expertise to promote efficient economic expansion and job creation.
- ★ The loan will encourage public-private sector partnerships, with an emphasis on upgrading e-governance services, particularly in the tourism sector.
- ★ The loan is provided by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) with a 15-year maturity period, including a five-year grace period.
- ★ The program emphasizes evidence-based planning, improved service delivery, and efficient use of public funds for inclusive growth.
- ★ The loan amount is for the enhancement of Maharashtra's online service portals (MAITRI 2.0 for business services and RTS portal for Government services) to improve access and efficiency.

RBI Launches Podcast to Broaden Distribution of Valuable Information

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is launching podcasts to expand its communication efforts and improve the dissemination of information to the public.
- ★ The move is part of the RBI's ongoing efforts to enhance transparency and better connect with the people, following the expansion of its communication toolkit, including the use of social media.
- ★ The podcasts will help the RBI explain complex topics in a simple manner, reaching a wider audience and enhancing public awareness about its decisions and actions.
- ★ The RBI has been utilizing both traditional and modern communication techniques to ensure greater impact and clarity in conveying the rationale behind its decisions and disseminating important messages to the public.

- ★ The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at 6.5% for the 11th consecutive time, maintaining a neutral monetary policy stance.
- ★ This indicates a continued effort to manage inflation and support economic growth without introducing sudden changes in interest rates.
- ★ The RBI has downwardly revised its GDP forecast for 2024-25 to 6.6%, down from the earlier forecast of 7.2%.
- ★ The Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) has been cut by 50 basis points, reducing it from 4.5% to 4%.

SBI Card Achieves Milestone of 20 Million Credit Cards in Circulation

- ★ SBI Card surpassed 20 million credit cards in circulation, marking a significant achievement in its credit card business, which started in 1998.
- ★ Between FY19 and FY24, SBI Card experienced a growth rate of around 25% CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) in the number of cards in force and a 26% CAGR in spends.
- ★ SBI Card is the second-largest credit card issuer in India, following HDFC Bank.
- ★ As of January 2024, HDFC Bank had also achieved the milestone of 20 million cards in circulation, with 22.64 million cards in October 2024.
- ★ According to RBI data for October 2024, SBI Card's circulation stood at nearly 19.8 million, showing a slight increase from 19.58 million in September 2024.
- ★ The total number of outstanding credit cards in India rose by 12.85% YoY (Year-on-Year) to 106.88 million in October 2024.
- ★ HDFC Bank and SBI Card led the additions with 241,119 and 220,265 new cards, respectively.

Axis Bank Launches 'ARISE Women's Savings Account'

- ★ Axis Bank, a private sector bank in India, launched the 'ARISE Women's Savings Account', aimed at addressing the financial needs of women.
- ★ The account provides healthcare benefits alongside a comprehensive financial solution tailored for women.
- ★ Account holders gain access to expert financial advisors.
- ★ The account offers customized investment options for women.
- ★ Services include health benefits, lifestyle support, and family-related assistance.
- ★ The account benefits extend to three family members.
- ★ Children's accounts can be linked without initial funding requirements.
- ★ **Locker Benefits:**
 - First-year Offer: No rental charges for small and medium-sized lockers.
 - Subsequent Years: 50% discount on locker rentals after the first year.
- ★ The card offers a ₹5 lakhs limit for Point of Sale (POS) transactions and ₹1 lakh limit for ATM withdrawals.

Federal Bank Launches “Kaliyum Karyavum”

- ★ The Federal Bank launched an initiative called “Kaliyum Karyavum” to teach life skills to school children through traditional art forms.
- ★ The event aims to educate children on essential life skills such as financial literacy, time management, and healthy digital screen usage habits.
- ★ It uses captivating traditional art forms as a medium to engage students in these lessons.
- ★ With over 90 years of history, Federal Bank is deeply rooted in Kerala and is utilizing its understanding of the state’s cultural heritage to enhance the learning experience.
- ★ “Kaliyum Karyavum” aims to bring age-old cultural forms to the present generation while promoting engaging and impactful learning methods.

IDFC FIRST Bank Enhances Customer Experience with India’s First AI

- ★ IDFC FIRST Bank has introduced India’s first AI-powered holographic digital avatar of legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan.
- ★ This move is aimed at setting a new benchmark in customer engagement and digital innovation.
- ★ The avatar is powered by a Holographic Extended Reality (HXR) device, which features touch capability, allowing users to interact directly with the digital version of Amitabh Bachchan.
- ★ This technology blends holographic projections and interactive elements to create a unique customer experience.
- ★ Currently, customers can engage with Amitabh Bachchan’s digital avatar and get information on bank products and services, including Zero Fee Banking, Monthly Interest Credits, Mobile Banking, and the innovative Current Account BRAVO.

BharatPe Launches ‘Shield’

- ★ BharatPe, a rapidly growing UPI payment service in India, has introduced ‘Shield’, a comprehensive fraud protection plan aimed at safeguarding digital UPI transactions.
- ★ The service is designed to offer secure and worry-free payment experiences for users.
- ★ BharatPe Shield provides robust coverage against digital fraud and seamless support for users.
- ★ The service is intended to help users feel more secure while making UPI transactions through the app.
- ★ Users making their first UPI transaction with the BharatPe App will receive 30 days of complimentary fraud protection, covering amounts up to ₹5,000.
- ★ After the initial 30-day free period, users can continue using BharatPe Shield for an affordable fee of ₹19 per month.
- ★ The plan offers a pre-reporting period, allowing users to claim losses incurred up to 10 days prior to reporting.

HSBC India Unveils Prive Premium Credit Card For Private Banking Customers

- ★ HSBC India, in collaboration with Mastercard, launched an invitation-only premium credit card for its private banking clients.
- ★ The card is designed for high-net-worth individuals (HNWI) and ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWI) with investable assets worth over \$2 million.
- ★ Travel Benefits includes companion first or business class airline tickets, premium airport lounge access, travel insurance, visa services, and zero forex mark-up on international spends.
- ★ Cardholders get access to private clubs, members-only lounges, and workspaces across Asia, Australia, Europe, and the US.
- ★ Premium Shopping Privileges includes offers on shopping, upgrades to the highest loyalty tiers with premium hospitality groups, and exclusive shopping privileges.

Deutsche Bank India Grants €91 Million Sustainability-Linked Loan to SMFG India Credit

- ★ Deutsche Bank India provided a €91 million (₹814 crore) sustainability-linked loan to SMFG India Credit (SMICC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group (SMFG).
- ★ The loan is a senior secured loan with a tenure of three years, in line with Deutsche Bank's Sustainable Finance framework criteria.
- ★ The loan aims to expand SMICC's portfolio, channel funds toward Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and support women entrepreneurs in underserved segments across India.
- ★ SMICC has over 1,000 branches and an Assets Under Management (AUM) of ₹49,800 crore as of September 2024.
- ★ The loan is intended to empower SMICC to enhance its lending reach, particularly in semi-urban and underserved areas of India.
- ★ The transaction reinforces Deutsche Bank's commitment to promoting sustainable finance in India, aligning with its ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) goals.
- ★ The loan highlights SMFG India Credit's programs centered on financial inclusion and women in finance as powerful impact drivers, supporting underrepresented groups in the economy.

RBI Increases Collateral-Free Agricultural Loan Limit to ₹2 Lakh per Borrower

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has raised the limit for collateral-free agriculture loans from ₹1.6 lakh to ₹2 lakh per borrower.
- ★ This decision is in response to inflation and rising agricultural input costs.
- ★ Objective: The revision aims to enhance the coverage of small and marginal farmers in the formal credit system.
- ★ The limit was previously increased from ₹1 lakh to ₹1.6 lakh in 2019.
- ★ Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loans up to ₹3 lakh can be issued without collateral, provided there is a Tri-Partite Agreement (TPA) among the borrower, milk unions, and banks for repayment assurance.
- ★ Banks are required to implement the revised loan limits by January 1, 2025.

- ★ The new limit applies to all Scheduled Commercial Banks (including Regional Rural Banks and Small Finance Banks), State Co-operative Banks, and District Central Co-operative Banks.

All India Bank Employees' Association Proposes A 3-Year Ban on Account Openings

- ★ The All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) has urged the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) to blacklist customers who attack or abuse bank staff, closing their accounts and preventing them from opening new accounts for at least 3 years.
- ★ AIBEA expressed concern over recent incidents where bank staff were physically assaulted and verbally abused by customers.
- ★ They emphasized that staff are working to earn a living, not to be victims of such attacks.
- ★ The attacks include both physical assaults and instances of abusive language directed at bank staff, including female employees.
- ★ A Union Bank of India official attacked by a customer over tax deductions.
- ★ A Canara Bank female staff member assaulted when a customer demanded a change to his CIBIL score, which was not under the bank's control.
- ★ These incidents have created a demoralizing effect on bank employees, with staff feeling that bank management is more focused on impaired loans than on the safety and well-being of its employees.

Phonepe Introduces Dengue and Malaria Insurance Plan

- ★ PhonePe launched a Dengue and Malaria Insurance Plan starting at ₹59 per year on its platform.
- ★ The plan offers comprehensive coverage of up to ₹1 lakh for medical expenses related to vector-borne and air-borne diseases, including Dengue and Malaria.
- ★ The plan is aimed at providing financial protection to users, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, against unexpected medical expenses due to these diseases.
- ★ The plan covers over 10 vector-borne and air-borne diseases, providing extensive health protection year-round.
- ★ The plan is available at an affordable premium, making it accessible to a wide range of users.

RBI To Integrate FX-Retail Platform with NPCI Bharat

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed to link the FX-Retail platform with the Bharat Connect platform of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- ★ The integration aims to enhance transparency and fairness in foreign exchange pricing, particularly for individuals and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- ★ Launched in 2019 by the Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL), the FX-Retail platform provides an internet-based application for buying and selling foreign exchange.
- ★ It serves a variety of users, including individuals, corporates, trusts, co-operative banks, and institutional investors.

- ★ The linkage between the FX-Retail platform and Bharat Connect will allow users to access and transact on the FX-Retail platform through integrated mobile apps, internet banking, and non-bank payment systems.
- ★ The first phase of this integration will include a pilot that facilitates the purchase of US Dollars against Indian Rupees by individuals and sole proprietors.
- ★ The linkage will expand the reach of the FX-Retail platform, offering enhanced user experience and wider accessibility for foreign exchange transactions.

\$500 Million ADB Loan to Develop Sustainable Infrastructure In India

- ★ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has sanctioned a \$500 million financial intermediation loan to India to finance environmentally sustainable infrastructure development in the country. The ADB approved the loan on 12 December 2024.
- ★ The \$500 million loan has been granted to India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL), owned by the Government of India.
- ★ The loan has a sovereign guarantee. It means that if IIFCL fails to repay the loan to the ADB, then the Government of India will repay the loan to ADB on behalf of the IIFCL.
- ★ The IIFCL will use the loan amount to provide loans to both greenfield (new projects) and brownfield (existing projects) sustainable infrastructure projects.
- ★ The special focus will be on providing finance for the connectivity and energy transition and sectors like urban projects, education, and health care.
- ★ The loan amount will be used to build the institutional capacity of IIFCL to integrate green technology and best practices into infrastructure projects.

ADB Revises India's GDP Growth Forecast

- ★ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has revised India's GDP growth forecast for FY2024-25 to 6.5%, a reduction of 50 basis points from the previous projection of 7%.
- ★ The new forecast is lower than the RBI's estimate of 6.6% and at the lowest end of the Government's projected range of 6.5%-7%.
- ★ The downward revision is attributed to lower-than-expected growth in private investment and housing demand.
- ★ Industrial growth was lower than expected at 3.6%.
- ★ Growth in agriculture and services sectors remained strong at 3.5% and 7.1%, respectively.
- ★ The agriculture sector is expected to remain strong, supported by the summer (kharif) crop season, which is likely to reduce food prices.
- ★ The services sector continues to show resilience.
- ★ Lower-than-expected Brent crude prices in 2024 and 2025 could also provide support to economic growth.

World Bank to Support Kerala Farmers in Adapting to Climate Change

- ★ The World Bank has approved a \$200 million project to help Kerala farmers adapt to climate change and promote agri-entrepreneurship.
- ★ The project is called the Kerala Climate Resilient AgriValue Chain Modernization (KERA) Project.
- ★ The project will benefit approximately 400,000 farmers in Kerala.
- ★ The project aims to promote climate-smart agricultural practices, including Replanting climate-resilient varieties of coffee, cardamom, and rubber and Expanding “food parks” in rural areas to support agri-businesses.
- ★ These parks will provide key infrastructure such as water, power, and waste management for agri-businesses focused on food processing and value-added products.
- ★ The project will foster alliances between farmer groups and agribusinesses to improve the link between producers and buyers, with public sector support.
- ★ The project will assist the incubation of agri-tech startups, facilitating innovation in the sector.
- ★ At least \$9 million in commercial finance will be leveraged, benefiting women-led Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).
- ★ The project aims to infuse private sector investment into agricultural value chains, benefiting farmers and SMEs.

Karnataka Bank Unveils ‘Retail Assets Centre’ in Bengaluru

- ★ Karnataka Bank has launched its first ‘Retail Assets Centre’ (RAC) in JP Nagara, Bengaluru, to streamline the bank’s retail loan processing.
- ★ The RAC serves as a centralized hub for various retail loan processes, including: Business co-ordination, Credit underwriting, Credit sanctions, Credit operations, Disbursements, Post-disbursement services
- ★ The RAC is aimed at catering to the growing demand for retail loan products and improving operational efficiency.
- ★ Karnataka Bank plans to extend the RAC to additional locations to serve customers across the country.
- ★ The RAC will initially focus on housing and mortgage loans but will also include MSME loans in the future.
- ★ Both physical and digital touchpoints will be provided for a comprehensive service experience for customers and channel partners.

World Bank Approved \$325.10 Million Loan for UP To Boost Farmer Income

- ★ The World Bank has approved a \$325.10 million loan to the Uttar Pradesh Government to boost the farmers’ income in the state.
- ★ The loan will finance the ₹3,903 crore or \$ 500 million. Uttar Pradesh Agricultural Growth and Rural Enterprises Ecosystem Strengthening (UP-AGREES) Project.
- ★ The project aims to improve crop productivity and increase farmer’s income in the state.

- ★ The loan was approved by the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors in a meeting in Washington, D.C. United States on 12 December 2024.
- ★ The total cost of the UP-AGREES project is ₹3,903 crore or \$ 500 million.
- ★ The World Bank will provide a \$325.10 million loan or ₹2,737 crore.
- ★ The State Government will provide ₹1,166 crore.
- ★ The private sector is expected to contribute \$15 million to the project.
- ★ The Project is also supported by the Governments of France, Israel and the Gates Foundation.
- ★ The World Bank loan of \$325.10 million will be provided through its subsidiary, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).
- ★ The loan repayment period is 33.5 years, including a grace period of 6 years.

World Bank Chief Economist Gill Urges India to Accelerate Structural Reforms

- ★ India is better positioned than many of its peers to handle global challenges but needs to accelerate structural reforms.
- ★ World Bank Chief Economist Indermit Gill stressed that India must speed up necessary structural changes to address inefficiencies and improve institutional resilience.
- ★ Gill highlighted the deceleration of global economic growth, with advanced economies seeing a halving of their potential growth rate over the past two decades.
- ★ Emerging markets and developing economies are also facing declining growth rates.
- ★ Inefficiencies arise from unproductive firms that hinder the reallocation of resources to more efficient firms.
- ★ A significant portion of India's talent pool, particularly women, is underutilised, despite the increasing demand for skilled labor.
- ★ India's energy-to-output ratios are high, making it one of the most energy-intensive economies globally.
- ★ Gill pointed out that middle-income countries like India are more vulnerable to economic slowdowns compared to low-income or high-income nations.
- ★ To transition into a high-income economy, India should prioritize increasing productivity through technology infusion and innovation, particularly by encouraging the growth of large firms, which are often engines of innovation.

RBI Grants In-Solutions Global Approval to Function as Payment Aggregator

- ★ In-Solutions Global (ISG) has received full authorisation from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as a payment aggregator under the Payment and Settlement Systems framework.
- ★ As a fully authorised payment aggregator, ISG will continue to play a key role in India's digital payments ecosystem, providing robust and reliable payment processing services to merchants and enterprises.
- ★ ISG processes over 28 billion transactions annually and serves more than 70% of banks in India.

- ★ The authorisation strengthens ISG's position as a trusted partner for enterprises and small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) by providing scalable payment solutions.
- ★ The company aims to empower businesses with secure, compliant, and seamless payment solutions.
- ★ ISG offers an integrated suite of payment solutions, including: Online platforms, Retail transactions, Transit payments, Prepaid payment instruments (PPI), National Common Mobility Card (NCMC), Gift cards.
- ★ ISG's approval reinforces its commitment to innovation, compliance, and service excellence in the digital payments space.
- ★ The company's prepaid payment instrument (PPI) licence complements this new authorisation.
- ★ The authorisation ensures that ISG's operations align with highest regulatory standards, offering seamless, secure, and scalable payment solutions.

Infrastructure Investment Expected to Reach 6.5% of GDP by 2029

- ★ India's infrastructure investment is expected to grow at a 15% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) over the next few years, with a focus on capex-driven sectors like roads, railways, and civil aviation.
- ★ Current infrastructure investment stands at 5.3% of GDP, projected to rise to 6.5% of Gross domestic product (GDP) by 2029, indicating a CAGR of 15.3%.
- ★ A historic budget of ₹111 lakh crore has been allocated for infrastructure projects, which is greater than the total GDP of many developing nations.
- ★ The Budget allocation for roads has increased ninefold from ₹31,130 crore in 2013-14 to ₹2.7 lakh crore in 2024-25.
- ★ India's national highway network has grown to 146,126 km as of July 2024, marking a 60% increase from 91,287 km in March 2014.
- ★ Improved road construction has led to a 20% reduction in freight truck transit times, resulting in potential savings of ₹2.4 lakh crore annually in logistics costs.
- ★ India aims to reduce logistics costs to 9% of GDP by 2025.
- ★ Indian Railways has been allocated ₹2.62 lakh crore for development, reflecting an eight-fold increase over the previous UPA Budget.

BOBCARD Unveils Premium Women's Credit Card 'TIARA'

- ★ BOBCARD Limited., a subsidiary of Bank of Baroda, has launched the TIARA Credit Card, a women-centric card aimed at supporting, empowering, and celebrating women's financial autonomy.
- ★ It is designed specifically for modern women, offering a blend of elegance and functionality.
- ★ The TIARA Credit Card is a premium product launched on the RuPay network.
- ★ It offers unparalleled rewards in categories such as travel, dining, lifestyle, entertainment, and health.

- ★ The card offers complimentary vouchers and memberships worth up to ₹31,000 from leading brands including:
- ★ Myntra, Nykaa, Flipkart, Lakme Salon, Urban Company, Book My Show, Big Basket, Swiggy One, Amazon Prime, Disney Hotstar, Gaana Plus, and Fitpass.
- ★ The card was launched at Pinkathon, a platform celebrating women's strength and resilience.

ICICI Bank teams up with Commonwealth Bank of Australia

- ★ ICICI Bank has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA).
- ★ The partnership aims to support customers across the Australia-India corridor, enhancing bilateral trade and investment opportunities.
- ★ Both banks will collaborate to introduce corporate and institutional customers interested in investing or setting up businesses in each other's home countries (Australia and India).
- ★ The banks will facilitate trade between corporate customers in Australia and India by providing banking services and guidance on cross-border trade opportunities.
- ★ The banks will provide banking services to customers migrating between Australia and India, ensuring seamless financial support for individuals relocating.
- ★ The partnership will enhance cross-border payments by collaborating on customer-centric solutions, making financial transactions smoother for businesses and individuals involved in trade and migration.
- ★ The collaboration emphasizes trade, investment, migration, and cross-border financial services, contributing to the strengthening of the Australia-India economic corridor.

InCred Finance Plans INR 5,000 Crore Initial Public Offering by Diwali 2025

- ★ InCred, a fintech unicorn, is planning its initial public offering (IPO) to raise INR 4,000 Cr to INR 5,000 Cr by late 2025.
- ★ The company is targeting a valuation between INR 15,000 and INR 22,500 Cr.
- ★ InCred aims to finalize merchant bankers to manage the IPO by January 2025, with a launch expected around Diwali 2025.
- ★ The IPO will include an Offer for Sale (OFS) component, allowing existing investors to offload stakes and realize returns.
- ★ InCred's founder and CEO, Bhupinder Singh, stated the IPO will only proceed once global private equity firm KKR, which holds a 13.4% stake, agrees to sell its shares during the IPO.
- ★ InCred reached unicorn status after raising \$60 Mn in a Series D funding round led by Manipal Education and Medical Group's Ranjan Pai, which valued InCred at \$1.04 Bn.
- ★ The company became one of only two startups to achieve unicorn status in 2023, along with Zepto, amid a challenging funding environment.

\$42 Million ADB Loan to Restore And Stabilise Maharashtra's Coastline

- ★ Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed an agreement with the Government of India to provide a \$42 million loan for the Maharashtra Sustainable Climate-Resilient Coastal Protection and Management Project.
- ★ The loan amount will be utilised to restore and stabilise Maharashtra's coastline.
- ★ The coastal erosion protection project aims to protect the livelihood of fishermen and those in the tourism sector who are adversely affected by poor coastal management, coastal erosion, and flooding.
- ★ The Project encourages the involvement of the local communities- women, youth, and vulnerable groups- in coastal zone management and to enhance their ability to prepare for and respond effectively to disasters.
- ★ The loan amount will be used to control coastal erosion, protect offshore reefs, and protect rock in identified coastal stretches of Maharashtra.
- ★ It will also fund projects using flexible nature-based solutions like beach and dune nourishment to protect the coastal areas.
- ★ It will fund the use of advanced technologies to predict climate change impacts, such as rising sea levels and extreme weather phenomena like torrential rains, cyclones, etc.

ADB \$100 Million Loan to SK Finance Limited

- ★ ADB has signed an agreement with SK Finance Limited, a non-banking finance company (NBFC), to provide a \$100 million loan.
- ★ SK Finance will use 20% of ADB's \$100 million loan to provide loans to customers for buying electric vehicles (EVs).
- ★ 80% of the \$100 million loan will be used by the company to provide loans, mainly to women-owned micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).
- ★ SK Finance Limited is a Delhi-based NBFC that mainly provides loans for vehicles and MSME loans.
- ★ Asian Development Bank is a multilateral bank owned by 69 countries.
- ★ It was set up as a regional development bank in 1966 to provide loans to the Asia Pacific countries for development purposes.

Federal Bank Partners with Ecofy to Tackle Green Financing for Msmes

- ★ Federal Bank, one of India's leading private sector banks, has joined hands with Ecofy, India's first green-only non-banking financial company (NBFC) supported by Eversource Capital, to provide innovative financing solutions for MSMEs investing in commercial rooftop solar installations.
- ★ This collaboration is among the first co-lending initiatives in India designed specifically to cater to the solar financing needs of MSMEs.
- ★ The program aims to finance 3,600 kW of rooftop solar installations annually, helping MSMEs reduce over 2,500 tons of CO₂ emissions per year.

- ★ MSMEs, predominantly operating during daytime, benefit from reduced electricity costs and contribute to India's climate goals.
- ★ The partnership addresses the high-interest rates and hesitant lending practices that have previously hindered MSMEs from adopting renewable energy solutions.
- ★ Federal Bank offers dedicated loans to finance solar and eco-friendly projects for Business Banking customers.
- ★ MSME loans constitute over 20% of the bank's total loan book, reflecting its active engagement in supporting this sector.

Times Internet Partners with ICICI Bank

- ★ Times Internet, in collaboration with ICICI Bank, has unveiled the Times Black ICICI Bank Credit Card, an ultra-premium offering tailored for high-net-worth individuals (HNIs) and affluent customers.
- ★ Powered by Visa, this card combines luxury, innovation, and tradition with a host of exclusive privileges and benefits.
- ★ The card features a metallic build and incorporates historic printing plates from The Times of India, representing innovation, tradition, and legacy.
- ★ Designed for India's affluent segment, the card aims to redefine luxury and provide exclusive lifestyle experiences.

\$350 Million ADB Loan to Modernise India's Logistic Sector

- ★ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has signed an agreement with the Government of India to provide a \$350 million policy-based loan for its Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem Program.
- ★ The loan will support modernisation and strengthen the country's logistic sector.
- ★ This is the second loan provided by the ADB to the Government of India's 'Strengthen the Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem Program'. In December 2022, ADB provided a \$250 million policy-based loan.
- ★ The loan agreement was signed by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance; Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry; and the ADB in New Delhi on 20 December 2024.
- ★ The policy-based loan of the ADB refers to the loans given to a country that has committed to reforming the economy or a sector of the economy. The country also faces a shortage of funds to carry out the agreed reform.
- ★ The loan is directly provided to the Government's general budget instead of paying for a particular project.
- ★ The present \$350 million loan will finance the second subprogram of the Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem Program.

World Bank, ADB Approve Loans for the Amravati Project of Andhra Pradesh

- ★ The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have approved separate loans to the Amaravati Inclusive and Sustainable Capital City Development Program of the Andhra Pradesh Government.
- ★ The Programme seeks to develop the new capital city of Andhra Pradesh, Amaravati, as a smart and green city with world-class infrastructure.
- ★ Both the World Bank and the ADB will finance the development of the first phase of the Amaravati project.
- ★ Both the multilateral institutions will provide loans in Japanese Yen.
- ★ Japan is a partner in developing Amaravati as a new modern city in Andhra Pradesh and has agreed to provide financial and technical assistance.
- ★ The Asian Development Bank has approved a \$788.8 million loan for the Amaravati project. In Japanese Yen, the loan value is 121.97 billion.
- ★ Apart from funding the project, the World Bank and ADB will also help bring technical expertise to lay the groundwork for a dynamic, sustainable, and vibrant capital city in Amravati.
- ★ The loan will be used to improve access to infrastructure and green spaces and build low-carbon transport infrastructure, water and sanitation services, and drainage systems to mitigate flood risks.
- ★ It will also support the state and Central Government in bringing anchor investors, generating private investment, and creating new jobs benefiting women and youth.

RBI Imposes ₹27.30 Lakh Penalty on IndusInd Bank

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposed a monetary penalty of ₹27.30 lakh on IndusInd Bank Limited for non-compliance with the 'Reserve Bank of India (Interest Rate on Deposits) Directions, 2016'.
- ★ The penalty was imposed under Section 47A(1)(c) read with Section 46(4)(i) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
- ★ The penalty follows findings from the Statutory Inspection for Supervisory Evaluation (ISE 2023) based on the bank's financial position as of March 31, 2023.
- ★ The penalty was imposed due to non-compliance with RBI directions, specifically related to opening savings deposit accounts in the name of ineligible entities.
- ★ The action focuses on regulatory compliance deficiencies and does not comment on the validity of any transactions or agreements between the bank and its customers.

RBI Levies Monetary Penalty on Manappuram Finance Limited

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has imposed a monetary penalty of ₹20 lakh on Manappuram Finance Limited for non-compliance with RBI's "Know Your Customer (KYC) Directions, 2016".
- ★ The penalty was imposed under Section 58G(1)(b) and Section 58B(5)(aa) of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
- ★ Reason for Penalty: The company failed to verify the Permanent Account Number (PAN) of customers using the verification facility of the issuing authority during customer acceptance.

- ★ The company allotted multiple identification codes to certain customers instead of assigning a Unique Customer Identification Code (UCIC) for each customer.
- ★ The penalty follows the findings of RBI's statutory inspection, based on the financial position as of March 31, 2023.
- ★ RBI issued a show cause notice to the company, and after considering the company's reply and oral submissions, the penalty was imposed for the sustained non-compliance.
- ★ The penalty is for regulatory deficiencies, and it does not address the validity of any transactions or agreements between the company and its customers

Bajaj Finance Exits Co-Branded Credit Card Business, Ends Partnerships with DBS India and RBL

- ★ Bajaj Finance has decided to exit the co-branded credit card space by ending its eight-year tie-up with RBL Bank and DBS Bank India.
- ★ The exit follows a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) direction that restricted co-brand partners to only sourcing cards and providing access to cardholders for goods/services offered.
- ★ RBL Bank partnered with Bajaj Finance in 2016 to issue co-branded credit cards for five years, and the partnership was renewed for another five years in 2021.
- ★ DBS Bank India launched its credit card with Bajaj Finance in June 2022, with a credit card base of 500,000, most of which were co-branded.

Central Bank of India Marks 114th Foundation Day Celebration

- ★ The Central Bank of India (CBI) Regional Office in Ranchi celebrated the 114th Foundation Day of the bank.
- ★ The program began with Regional Head Sunil Kumar garlanding the portrait of Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala, the founder of the bank.
- ★ The Central Bank of India, established on December 21, 1911, by Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala, is the first indigenous bank in India.
- ★ The bank's mission was to connect Indian citizens, particularly those deprived of banking services during British rule, to banking operations.
- ★ The bank has around 5,000 branches across India, with 75% of these located in rural and semi-urban areas.
- ★ The bank provides various public utility and attractive deposit and loan products that benefit the population, especially in remote areas.
- ★ The Sukhdev Nagar branch was inaugurated in a new building by Regional Head Sunil Kumar.
- ★ Certificates were awarded to Branch Managers for outstanding performance in various banking parameters in the current financial year.
- ★ A total loan amount of approximately ₹52 crores was sanctioned by branches under the regional office.
- ★ The event included colorful programs such as songs and music, celebrating the bank's legacy and progress.

- ★ The officers and employees of the Ranchi Regional Office played a significant role in the successful conduct of the event.

HDFC Bank Completes First Gold Forward Transaction from Gujarat GIFT City

- ★ HDFC Bank has become the first domestic bank to execute a gold forward deal from GIFT City (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City).
- ★ This transaction marks a significant milestone in India's bullion trading ecosystem.
- ★ The transaction was carried out by HDFC Bank's International Banking Unit (IBU) at GIFT City in collaboration with Hindustan Platinum, a global refiner and manufacturer of high-purity precious metals.
- ★ A gold forward deal is an agreement to buy or sell a specific quantity of gold at a predetermined price for a future date.
- ★ Such deals help businesses dealing with gold to hedge against price risks.
- ★ HDFC Bank's IBU is a trading and clearing member of the Indian International Bullion Exchange (IIBX).
- ★ The bank is committed to supporting the development of the bullion ecosystem at GIFT City.

Fintechs Request Reserve Bank of India Approval to Offer Credit Lines on UPI Platform

- ★ Non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) in the digital lending space have requested the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to allow them to offer pre-approved credit on the UPI platform.
- ★ On December 6, 2024, the RBI extended pre-approved credit lines on UPI to small finance banks.
- ★ NBFCs and fintech companies raised this request during the RBI's monthly "finteraction" sessions, designed for discussions with the fintech industry.
- ★ The request aims to enable fintech companies to offer low-ticket, low-tenor credit products, especially to new-to-credit customers, in line with the RBI's objectives.
- ★ Fintech firms are hopeful that the RBI will soon extend the UPI-based credit facility to them, given the move for small finance banks.
- ★ The move will improve credit access, particularly for bottom-of-the-pyramid customers, by offering small loans in a cost-efficient manner.
- ★ Fintech NBFCs argue that leveraging their high-tech, low-cost model could enhance UPI-based lending, making small loans more accessible.

RBI Forms 8-Member Committee to Create Framework for Responsible Artificial Intelligence

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has established an 8-member committee to develop a framework for the responsible and ethical enablement of artificial intelligence (AI) in the financial sector.
- ★ The committee is tasked with creating the FREE-AI framework (Responsible and Ethical Enablement of AI in Financial Services).

- ★ The committee will be led by Professor Pushpak Bhattacharyya from IIT Bombay (Department of Computer Science and Engineering).
- ★ Other members include professionals from various sectors such as technology, banking, and regulatory bodies, including:
 - Debjani Ghosh (Independent Director, Reserve Bank Innovation Hub)
 - Balaraman Ravindran (Professor and Head, Wadhvani School of Data Science and AI, IIT Madras)
 - Abhishek Singh (Additional Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology)
 - Rahul Matthan (Partner, Trilegal)
 - Anjani Rathor (Group Head and Chief Digital Experience Officer, HDFC Bank)
 - Sree Hari Nagaralu (Head of Security AI Research, Microsoft India)
 - Suvendu Pati (CGM, FinTech Department, RBI).
- ★ The committee will submit its report within six months from its first meeting.
- ★ The RBI's decision to form this committee was announced during the December 2023 Monetary Policy Meeting.
- ★ The committee will focus on creating a governance framework for the ethical and responsible adoption of AI models and applications in the Indian financial sector.

SEBI Imposes ₹6 Lakh Penalty on EbixCash and Ebix

- ★ Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) imposed a ₹6 lakh fine on EbixCash Limited and its promoter entity Ebix Inc for non-compliance with disclosure norms.
- ★ The fine was levied due to violations related to the company's proposed Initial Public Offering (IPO).
- ★ EbixCash filed its Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with SEBI in March 2022 but withdrew the filing in December 2023.
- ★ The fine followed an investigation into the violation of SEBI's Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements (ICDR) norms.
- ★ SEBI imposed a fine of ₹3 lakh each on EbixCash Ltd and Ebix Inc for failing to adhere to the disclosure norms.

Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Launches Two New Motor Insurance Products

- ★ Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, a leading non-life player, has introduced two motor insurance add-on covers: Eco Assure — Repair Protection and Named Driver Cover.
- ★ These covers aim to enhance value and customisation for policyholders.
- ★ The Eco Assure — Repair Protection add-on enables cost-effective repairs without compulsory deductibles.
- ★ This add-on is available for private cars up to 12 years old under the Own Damage section of the policy.
- ★ The add-on includes a one-year repair protection, door-to-door vehicle pick-up and drop-off, and repair services at Bajaj Allianz's preferred workshops without depreciation costs.

- ★ The Named Driver Cover is tailored for individuals owning one or multiple cars driven primarily by specific individuals.
- ★ This add-on secures own-damage coverage for the named drivers, promoting safe driving and providing customised insurance benefits.

TCS Renews Financial Inclusion Partnership with Bank of Baroda

- ★ Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has extended its partnership with Bank of Baroda (BoB) for five more years to continue its financial inclusion solution implementation across India.
- ★ The deal aims to enhance banking services for India's unbanked populations, promoting financial inclusion.
- ★ TCS will deploy its Financial Inclusion Gateway Solution, which includes both hardware and software for the bank's data centers.
- ★ The solution will facilitate essential banking services such as account opening, Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) and National Electronic Funds Transfers (NEFT), and Aadhaar and debit card-based transactions.
- ★ The solution will streamline enrollment in Government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana and Atal Pension Yojana.
- ★ This extension marks the fourth renewal of TCS's partnership with Bank of Baroda, which began in 2010.

BUSINESS NEWS

SEBI Imposes Cap on New Fund Offer Fundraise

- ★ Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has mandated mutual funds to specify the amount they plan to raise in a New Fund Offer (NFO) based on their ability to deploy the raised funds within a specified timeframe.
- ★ The objective is to ensure that mutual funds only collect as much money in NFOs as they can reasonably deploy, typically within 30 days, as per the scheme's asset allocation.
- ★ If the Fund Manager is unable to deploy the funds within the specified timeline, investors are allowed to exit the scheme without paying an exit load.
- ★ SEBI has introduced measures to combat mis-selling during NFOs.
- ★ In switch transactions, distributors will be entitled to the lower of the two commissions offered under the two schemes involved in the transaction.
- ★ SEBI has relaxed various regulatory frameworks, including:
 - Minimum investment requirements for mutual funds.
 - Disclosure frequency and lock-in periods for employees who have resigned.
 - Empowerment of the Nomination and Remuneration Committee to ensure compliance.
 - Relaxed requirements for employees managing liquid funds.
 - Relaxed redemption norms.

- ★ Mutual funds are mandated to disclose the results of stress testing for all schemes to enhance transparency.
- ★ The new rules are expected to create urgency among investors, similar to equity IPOs, as the cap on NFO fundraising could encourage swift action by investors to avoid missing out.

Bata India Partners with Zepto for Quick Footwear Deliveries

- ★ Footwear giant Bata India has entered the fast-growing quick commerce market by teaming up with Zepto, offering swift deliveries across Delhi NCR.
- ★ The initiative aims to cater to the increasing demand for fast and convenient shopping experiences, with plans to expand services to other major metropolitan cities.
- ★ The partnership integrates Bata's stylish and high-quality footwear with Zepto's rapid delivery network.
- ★ Designed to strengthen Bata's omni-channel presence, the collaboration ensures that customers can shop online, in-store, or opt for rapid doorstep delivery.
- ★ The service caters to last-minute footwear needs, particularly during high-demand periods such as the winter wedding season.

DEFENCE

13th Edition of India-Singapore Agni Warrior Military Exercise

- ★ The Indian and Singaporean Army concluded their joint military exercise code-named 'Agni Warrior' on 30th November 2024.
- ★ Field Firing Ranges, Devlali (Maharashtra), hosted the 13th edition of the Agni Warrior exercise between the armies of the two countries from 28 to 30 November 2024.
- ★ The 12th edition was also held at the Field Firing Ranges, Devlali (Maharashtra), in November 2022.
- ★ This was the third bilateral exercise between the two countries in October and November 2024.
- ★ In October, the 12th edition of the India-Singapore Joint Military Training exercise was held at the Kalaikunda Air Force Station in West Bengal, and the 31st edition of the Singapore-Indian Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) was held at Visakhapatnam.
- ★ Both countries' artillery regiments participated in the Agni Warrior exercise. The Indian Army's 114 personnel from the Artillery Regiment and 182 from the Singapore Artillery participated in the exercise.
- ★ The exercise showcased the joint firepower planning, execution, and use of New-Generation Equipment by the Artillery of both the Armies.
- ★ The Exercise involved extensive joint preparation, co-ordination, an understanding of each other's capabilities and procedures, and the evolution of a common interface between Indian and Singapore Artillery procedures.

1st Indo-Cambodian ‘CINBAX’ Exercise

- ★ India-Cambodia’s first Joint Tabletop Exercise, codenamed ‘CINBAX’, commenced at the Foreign Training Node, Pune, Maharashtra, on 1 December 2024.
- ★ The first CINBAX exercise between the Armies of both countries will be held in Pune from 1 to 18 December 2024.
- ★ The exercise is part of the military diplomacy of both countries to strengthen friendly ties between the two countries, especially military-to-military ties.
- ★ During the CINBAX exercise, Indian-made weapons systems and equipment will be displayed to the Cambodians to promote the Indigenous defence capabilities of India.
- ★ In the first CINBAX military exercise, 20 members of the Indian Army’s Infantry brigade and an equal number of Cambodian Army personnel are participating.
- ★ The CINBAX exercise will be conducted in three phases so that the participants and personnel of both armies will understand the practical issues involved in joint counter-terrorism operations.
 - Phase-I will focus on preparing and orienting participants for counter-terrorism operations during UN peacekeeping missions.
 - Phase-II will involve the conduct of the Table Top exercises and
 - Phase-III will involve the finalisation of plans and summing up.

Indian Army Commence 2024 Harimau Shakti Exercise

- ★ India and Malaysia commenced the bilateral Joint Military Exercise “Harimau Shakti” on 2 December 2024 at Bentong camp, Pahang district, Malaysia. In 2023, the Indian Army hosted the exercise at its Umroi Cantonment in Meghalaya.
- ★ The 2024 edition of the annual bilateral exercise will be held from 2 to 15 December 2024.
- ★ The first annual bilateral military exercise, Harimau Shakti, between the Indian Army contingent and the Malaysian Army contingent was held in October 2012 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- ★ The joint combat exercise aims to create greater synergy and interoperability between the two armed forces.
- ★ The exercise will boost friendly military ties between the two countries and enhance their capability to undertake joint counter-insurgency operations in jungle terrain.
- ★ The exercise will be conducted in two phases.
 - Phase-I: The first phase will focus on cross-training between both Armies, including lectures, demonstrations, and practice of various drills in jungle terrain.
 - Phase-II: Both armies will take an active part in a simulated exercise, wherein troops will execute various drills, including Anti- Ambush, Occupation of Harbour, and Carrying out Recce Patrol, Ambush and an Attack on an area taken over by the terrorists.

Russian Built INS Tushil Commissioned in Indian Navy

- ★ The Russian-built multi-role stealth-guided missile frigate INS Tushil was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 9 December 2024 at the Yantar Shipyard in Kaliningrad, Russia.

- ★ The flag-raising ceremony was held in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Russian Deputy Minister of Defence Alexander Vasilyevich Fomin, Ambassador of India to Russia Vinay Kumar, and other senior officials from both countries.
- ★ Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is on an official visit to Russia from 8 to 10 December 2024 to attend the 21st Meeting of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Mission on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation, which will be held in Moscow on 10 December 2024.
- ★ The two frigates, Tushil (Admiral Butakov) and Tamal (Admiral Istomin) were being built for the Russian Navy, and construction started in 2013. Both frigates are powered by gas turbine engines, which were to be supplied by the Zorya-Mashproekt company in Mykolaiv, Ukraine.
- ★ Unlike the six earlier frigates, the INS Tushil uses a lot of Indian equipment. Around 26% of the frigates' equipment is of Indian origin, and 33 Indian-made systems are onboard the frigate.
- ★ INS Tushil includes made-in-India PJ-10 BrahMos missiles, sonar systems, surface surveillance radar, depth charge rocket launchers, and communications systems.
- ★ INS Tushil is a stealth frigate capable of anti-submarine warfare.
- ★ INS Tushil is designed for bluewater operations and is capable of conducting air, surface, underwater, and electromagnetic warfare.

4th Edition of 'SAMPARK' ECHS Outreach Initiative for Naval Veterans

- ★ The 4th edition of SAMPARK, an outreach initiative by the ECHS (Navy), is aimed at ensuring the well-being of Naval Veterans, Veer Naris, and their families by providing direct communication and healthcare services.
- ★ The initiative seeks to provide quality healthcare services and support to Naval Veterans and their families, particularly in remote and inaccessible areas, in line with the Chief of the Naval Staff's (CNS) vision.
- ★ The outreach will be conducted by a team of one Officer and five Sailors over a 10-day period, visiting multiple ECHS polyclinics across Maharashtra.
- ★ Interactive and immersive sessions will be held at each ECHS polyclinic to directly engage with veterans, address their grievances, and provide guidance on accessing medical services.
- ★ SAMPARK 4.0 aims to enhance trust by ensuring veterans feel heard, supported, and cared for, and will assist in resolving any issues faced in accessing healthcare services.
- ★ Veterans will be able to register grievances related to healthcare services, and ECHS (Navy) will work to resolve these issues, ensuring adequate care is provided to every veteran.

Indian Naval Ship Nirdeshak Set to Be Commissioned at Naval Dockyard

- ★ Indian Naval Ship (INS) Nirdeshak, a state-of-the-art survey vessel, will be commissioned on 18 December 2024 at Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam.
- ★ The ceremony will be presided over by Union Minister of State for Defence, Shri Sanjay Seth.
- ★ It will be hosted by the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command.

- ★ Built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata, INS Nirdeshak has over 80% indigenous content, showcasing India's capabilities in ship design and construction.
- ★ The ship is part of the Survey Vessel (Large) Project.
- ★ Indian Naval Ship (INS) Nirdeshak was launched on 26 May 2022.
- ★ The vessel is 110 meters long with a displacement of approximately 3800 tons.
- ★ It is powered by two diesel engines.
- ★ The ship is equipped with Hydrographic and Oceanographic Survey Equipment.
- ★ INS Nirdeshak will conduct hydrographic surveys, support maritime operations, and aid in navigation.
- ★ It is the second ship of the Survey Vessel (Large) Project.

MoD Sign ₹7628.70 crore Deal to Buy K9 VAJRA Artillery Guns from L&T

- ★ The Union Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed a contract with the Indian company Larsen and Toubro (L&T) to buy 100 K9 VAJRA-T Self-Propelled Tracked Artillery Guns for the Indian Army at the cost of ₹7628.70 crore.
- ★ This is the second deal for the K9 Vajra --T Artillery Gun with the L&T. In 2017, the MoD signed a ₹4366 crore deal with L&T to procure 100 Artillery Guns.
- ★ The inking of the deal with an Indian defence company is part of the Indian Government's effort to promote the indigenous defence ecosystem in the country and make the country self-reliant in critical defence technology and equipment.
- ★ The K9 Vajra-T Artillery Guns is an indigenous version of the South Korean mobile howitzer (K9) developed by the Samsung Techwin company, now known as Hanwha Defence.
- ★ The Artillery Gun has been modified according to the needs of the Indian Army and has been co-produced by Larsen and Toubro Heavy Engineering and Hanwha Defence in India.
- ★ The modified Artillery Gun is called K9 Vajra-T.
- ★ The Vajrat-T Artillery Gun is a shoot-and-scoot type of artillery gun. The Indian Army normally uses towed artillery guns, which are attached to a vehicle and towed to a battlefield.
- ★ The Vajra-T is a self-propelled artillery gun equipped with a 1,000-horsepower engine. It can move at over 60 km per hour and travel up to 450 km.

Indo-Sri Lankan Naval Ex-SLINEX 2024 Concludes at Visakhapatnam

- ★ The 11th edition of the annual India-Sri Lanka Naval exercise SLINEX 24 concluded at Visakhapatnam on 20 December 2024.
- ★ The Eastern Naval Command of the Indian Navy organised the annual SLINEX exercise from 17-20 December 2024 at Visakhapatnam and in the Bay of Bengal.
- ★ Visakhapatnam is the headquarters of the Eastern Naval Command.
- ★ The SLINEX exercise is an exercise which is conducted in two phases: the Harbour phase and the Sea Phase.

- Harbour Phase – The main aim of the Harbour phase of the Naval exercise is to strengthen the bonding between the Naval personnel of the participating Navies. During this phase, the personnel of both the Navies engaged in cultural activities, sports activities, etc.
- Sea Phase – During the sea phase of the exercise both Navies engage in warship training by deploying their ships, use of live ammunition testing their naval strategies.
- ★ In SLINEX 24 Special Forces of both navies participated in the sea phase of the exercise, tested their communications procedures, seamanship as well as navigation evolutions and helicopter operations.

18th India -Nepal Military Exercise Surya Kiran

- ★ The 334-strong Indian Army contingent has departed to Nepal to participate in the 18th edition of the bilateral military exercise Surya Kiran.
- ★ The exercise will be hosted by the Nepali Army in Saljhandi, Nepal from 31st December 2024 to 13th January 2025.
- ★ The annual bilateral military exercise Surya Kiran is alternatively hosted by the Indian Army and the Nepali Army.
- ★ The 17th edition of the Surya Kiran was held in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand from 24th November to 7th December 2023.
- ★ The Surya Kiran military exercise is a battalion-level exercise. In the 18th edition of the military exercise, a 334-member contingent from the 11th Gorkha Rifles Regiment is participating.
- ★ Like all bilateral military exercises, the aim of the Surya Kiran is two-fold- establishing a strong bond between the army personnel of both countries and sharpening their professional skills.
- ★ To enhance their professional skills the Surya Kiran exercise will focus on conducting joint operations in jungle warfare, and counter-terrorism operations.

RANKS, INDICES & REPORTS

IIT Delhi Tops Indian Institutions in QS Sustainability Rankings 2025

- ★ The QS World University Rankings Sustainability 2025 were released, showcasing universities' global and environmental contributions.
- ★ IIT Delhi emerged as the highest-ranked Indian institution, holding the 171st global position and achieving an 81.1 percentile in Environmental Sustainability.
- ★ IIT Delhi climbed an impressive 255 places from last year's 426th rank.
- ★ IIT Kharagpur and IIT Bombay ranked 202nd and 234th globally, improving by 147 and 69 places, respectively.
- ★ Among the 78 Indian universities, 21 are new entrants, and nine of the top 10 institutions showed notable improvements.

- ★ University of Toronto: Achieved the top spot globally with 91 points in Environmental Sustainability and 98.5 points in Environmental Research.
- ★ The QS Sustainability Rankings evaluate universities based on their environmental and social impact.

2024 Network Readiness Index (NRI)

- ★ India has achieved a significant milestone in the 2024 Network Readiness Index (NRI), advancing 11 places from 60th in 2023 to 49th.
- ★ With a score of 53.63, up from 49.93 the previous year, this leap underscores the nation's commitment to enhancing its digital infrastructure and technology adoption.
- ★ The Portulans Institute, which publishes the NRI, evaluates how nations leverage technology for governance, citizen engagement, and innovation.
- ★ India climbed 11 spots, reflecting notable advancements in digital infrastructure and technology adoption.
- ★ 2024 Score of India is 53.63

AWARDS & PRIZES

Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament, and Development 2023

- ★ The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament, and Development for 2023 was awarded to Daniel Barenboim, a world-renowned pianist and conductor, and Ali Abu Awwad, a Palestinian peace activist.
- ★ This prestigious honour highlights their exceptional efforts in fostering peace and non-violence across cultural and political divides.
- ★ **Daniel Barenboim:** Building Bridges Through Music
 - He was recognized for using music as a powerful medium to promote understanding and harmony across cultures.
 - His musical initiatives serve as tools to reduce cultural and political tensions, demonstrating the unifying power of art.
- ★ **Ali Abu Awwad:** A Champion of Non-Violence
 - He was honored for his peace-building efforts through his organisation, Roots, which fosters dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis.
 - Despite personal tragedy, including the loss of his brother in the conflict, Awwad advocates for reconciliation over revenge.

GAIL Wins “Initiatives in Promoting Hydrogen Company of the Year” Award

- ★ GAIL (India) Limited has been honoured with the prestigious “Initiatives in Promoting Hydrogen Company of the Year” award at the FIPI Oil and Gas Awards 2023.

- ★ The award was presented by Hardeep S Puri, Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, during a ceremony held in New Delhi.
- ★ The event was also attended by Suresh Gopi, Union Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Pankaj Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG).
- ★ Key executives from GAIL, including CMD Sandeep Kumar Gupta, RK Jain (Director, Finance), Deepak Gupta (Director, Projects), and Ayush Gupta (Director, HR), were also present at the event.
- ★ The award recognizes GAIL's pioneering efforts in advancing hydrogen technology, with significant investments in research and development.
- ★ The green hydrogen project is expected to be a step toward sustainable and clean energy solutions in India, helping to ensure energy security.

UNESCO Heritage Award

- ★ Two Indian heritage conservation projects — the Abathsahayeswarar Temple Conservation Project in Thukkatchi, Tamil Nadu, and the BJPCI Conservation Project of Mumbai, Maharashtra — have won UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation 2024.
- ★ These two heritage conservation projects were among eight from the Asia Pacific region that won the 2024 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation.
- ★ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) announced the award winners at its regional office in Bangkok, Thailand, on 6 December 2024.
- ★ The Abathsahayeswarar Temple Conservation Project won the Award of Distinction in the UNESCO's Award category.
- ★ The Temple was awarded the UNESCO Award of Distinction for using modern engineering expertise and the know-how of Hindu temple builders, sthapati, for structural conservation.
- ★ The BJPCI (Sir Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsee Charitable Institution) Conservation project bagged the Merit Award of UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation 2024.
- ★ It was built to promote education amongst the economically weaker sections of society. The restoration work was done during the school's two-month summer break.

Donald Trump Honored as “Patriot of the Year” in New York

- ★ US President-elect Donald Trump was awarded the “Patriot of the Year” honour at the Tilles Centre in New York.
- ★ The event was organized by Fox Nation, celebrated America's patriots, including military veterans, first responders, and inspirational figures.
- ★ Trump called his election victory night “tremendous” in his acceptance speech.
- ★ The event served as an acknowledgment of his contributions and support for patriotic causes.

Google Play's Best of 2024 Awards

- ★ Google Play has announced its Best of 2024 awards for India, recognizing significant mobile app and game innovations, particularly in the artificial intelligence (AI) and gaming sectors.

- ★ Indian companies have demonstrated strong domestic innovation, with five out of the seven winning apps developed in India.
- ★ Best App and Best for Fun awards were won by Alle, an AI-powered fashion styling app.
- ★ Squad Busters won Best Game for its multiplayer experience, reflecting India's growing mobile gaming audience.
- ★ SuperGaming's Indus Battle Royale earned Best Made in India for the second consecutive year.
- ★ Battlegrounds Mobile India (BGMI) claimed the Best Ongoing category for its regular updates and India-centric content.
- ★ WhatsApp Messenger was named Best Multi-device App.
- ★ Headlyne won Best for Personal Growth.
- ★ Sony LIV was recognized for being Best for Large Screens.
- ★ Clash of Clans was awarded Best Multi-device Game.
- ★ Bloom claimed Best Indie Game, while Cookie Run: Tower of Adventures won Best for Google Play Games on PC.

UNEP Champions of Earth Award

- ★ Veteran Indian ecologist Madhav Gadgil has been chosen as one of the six persons/institutions to be honoured with the prestigious 2024 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 'Champions of the Earth' award.
- ★ Madhav Gadgil, along with Brazilian Sonia Guajajara, Lu Qi of China, Amy Bowers Cordalis of the USA, Gabriel Paun of România, and the Egyptian environmental organisation Sekem, has been chosen for this year 'Champions of the Earth' award in various categories.
- ★ The 'Champions of the Earth' award is considered as the United Nations' highest environmental honour.
- ★ Madhav Gadgil was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement category of the UNEP's 'Champion of the Earth' Award.
- ★ Madhav Gadgil has been honoured for his research, which has helped to protect marginalised people, promote the community-driven conservation of ecosystems, from forests to wetlands, and influence policymaking at the highest level.
- ★ Madhav Gadgil was the Chairman of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, set up by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest in 2010.
- ★ In its report submitted to the Government in 2011, the committee recommended that 75% of the 129,037 sq km area of the Western Ghats be declared environmentally sensitive due to its dense evergreen forest and endemic species.
- ★ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) instituted the Champions of the Earth Award in 2005.
- ★ The annual award is given to an individual or to an organisation that works to find innovative and sustainable solutions to the challenges of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Nature Loss, Pollution and Waste.

2024 Nobel Prize winners Honoured in Stockholm and Oslo

- ★ The winners of the 2024 Nobel Prizes were awarded in a ceremony held in the Swedish capital city of Stockholm and the Norwegian capital of Oslo on 10 December 2024.
- ★ The Nobel Prize instituted in the memory of Alfred Noble by the Noble Foundation is conferred to the winners on 10th December every year.
- ★ The Stockholm-born Swedish inventor and businessman Alfred Nobel died on 10 December 1896.
- ★ The prize winner of Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine and Economic Science is honoured at a ceremony in Stockholm, while the Peace prize winner is facilitated in Oslo.
 - Physics: John Hopfield (American), Geoffrey Hinton (British-Canadian Citizen).
 - Chemistry: David Baker (American), Demis Hassabis (British), John Jumper (American).
 - Physiology or Medicine: Victor Ambros (American), Gary Ruvkun (American).
 - Literature: Han Kang (South Korea).
 - Economics: Daron Acemoglu (Turkish American), Simon Johnson (British-American) and James Robinson (American).
 - Peace: Nihon Hidankyo (organisation of Japan).
- ★ The winner of the Nobel Prize gets a cash prize of 11 million Swedish kroner. If there is more than one winner, then the prize money is shared.

JC Daniel Award 2023 for Lifetime Contributions to Malayalam Cinema

- ★ Renowned filmmaker Shaji N Karun has been awarded the JC Daniel Award 2023, the highest honor in Kerala cinema, for his extraordinary lifetime contributions to Malayalam cinema.
- ★ This recognition celebrates his pivotal role in shaping new-wave cinema and bringing Malayalam films to international acclaim.
- ★ The award includes a purse of ₹5 lakh, a citation, and a statuette.
- ★ It is presented annually by the Kerala State Government to honor lifetime contributions to cinema.
- ★ Shaji N Karun's films have consistently earned international acclaim, bringing Malayalam cinema to the global stage.

A.R. Rahman Named Honorary President of Trinity Laban Conservatoire

- ★ Two-time Oscar-winning composer R. Rahman has been named the Honorary President of Trinity Laban, the United Kingdom's leading conservatoire for music, musical theatre, and contemporary dance.
- ★ His five-year term places him alongside distinguished predecessors like conductor Charles Mackerras and violinist Yehudi Menuhin.
- ★ Rahman is working with Trinity Laban to explore incorporating musical theatre into its curriculum, a field he is actively promoting.
- ★ His contributions include "Bombay Dreams" with Andrew Lloyd Webber and the "Lord of the Rings" musical.

- ★ Trinity Laban will commemorate Rahman's appointment with an Indian music event at Blackheath Halls on March 7, 2025, featuring student performances of Rahman's compositions.

Donald Trump Named Time Magazine's 2024 Person of the Year

- ★ Time magazine has named Donald Trump its Person of the Year for 2024, marking the second time the former and now re-elected U.S. President has received the honor.
- ★ This recognition celebrates his historic political comeback, his transformative role in American politics, and his impact on the global stage.
- ★ On November 5, 2024, Trump won over Vice President Kamala Harris, securing his return to the White House.
- ★ Time described this achievement as a "comeback of historic proportions", given the challenges he faced in his post-presidency years.
- ★ Trump is credited with driving a once-in-a-generation political realignment, reshaping the American political landscape.
- ★ His policies and leadership have had a profound effect on domestic governance and international relations.

D. Gukesh: Youngest World Chess Champion Honored with ₹5 Crore Prize

- ★ Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin announced a ₹5 crore cash reward for Chennai-based Grandmaster D. Gukesh after his historic achievement of becoming the youngest World Chess Champion.
- ★ At just 18 years old, D. Gukesh became the youngest player to win the World Chess Championship, defeating reigning champion Ding Liren of China in the final game of the 14-match series in Singapore.
- ★ Gukesh secured 7.5 points to Ding's 6.5, clinching victory in the classical time-control format.
- ★ As the winner, Gukesh will receive USD 1.3 million (₹11.03 crore) from the tournament's USD 2.5 million prize pool.

FIFA Best Male Awards 2024

- ★ Brazilian and Real Madrid football player Vinicius Junior won the 2024 FIFA Best Male Footballer of the Year award. Spain and Barcelona midfielder Aitana Bonmatí won the FIFA Best Female Player award.
- ★ The winners of the 2024 FIFA Awards were announced and felicitated at a function held in Doha, Qatar, on 17 December 2024. FIFA President Gianni Infantino gave the awards to the winners.
- ★ FIFA awards honours male and female players and coaches for their performance in the current football season.
- ★ FIFA is the world governing body of football.
 - Best FIFA Women's Player — Aitana Bonmatí of Spain and Barcelona football club of Spain
 - Best FIFA Men's Player — Vinicius Junior of Spain and Real Madrid football club of Spain
 - Best FIFA Women's Goalkeeper — Alyssa Naeher of the United States of America

- Best FIFA Men's Goalkeeper – Emiliano Martínez of Argentina and English club Aston Villa.
- Best FIFA Women's Coach – Emma Hayes, coach of the United States women's team.
- Best FIFA Men's Coach – Carlo Ancelotti, coach of the Real Madrid football club of Spain.
- 1st Marta Award – Marta of Brazil.
- ★ FIFA has instituted the award in honour of the legendary Brazilian women's footballer Marta, and it is given to the best goal scored in a season. The first winner was Marta herself.
- ★ Puskas Award – Alejandro Garnacho of English football club Manchester United.
- ★ The Puskas Award was instituted by FIFA in 2009 in honour of Ferenc Puskas of Hungary. It is given to the best goal scored by a male football player in a football season.
- ★ FIFA Fair Play Award – Thiago Maia of Brazil.
- ★ He was chosen by a panel of experts. He was honoured for his efforts to help people affected by floods in the Rio Grande do Sul region of Brazil in 2024.

Patricia Mukhim and Activists Honored for Peace-Building Efforts

- ★ Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) honored 10 peacebuilders for their exceptional work with women in areas of prolonged conflict across South Asia.
- ★ The Saahas Awards Ceremony, held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, marked a celebration of grassroots contributions to fostering peace and gender equality.
- ★ WISCOMP, an initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama organized.
- ★ The jury included prominent figures like former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, former Chief Justice Gita Mittal, and country representative of UN Women Susan Reguson.
- ★ Individuals and organizations from South Asia working to promote peace, address gender-based violence, and support marginalized women are awardees.
- ★ **Patricia Mukhim**
 - Award: Saahas Shrestha: Shero of Courage.
 - Recognition: For her role as Editor of The Shillong Times and her exceptional contributions to peace-building in India's northeast.
- ★ **Laxmi Chetri (Action Northeast Trust)**
 - Award: Shakti Award.
 - Contribution: Advocacy for women subjected to gender-based violence.
- ★ **Deepa Pawar (Anubhuti Charitable Trust)**
 - Award: Shakti Award.
 - Contribution: Empowering marginalized women from nomadic communities.
- ★ **Conflict Victim Women National Network, Nepal**
 - Award: Chetna Award.
 - Contribution: Psycho-social support for female victims of conflict in Nepal.

★ **Omar Hafiz**

- Award: Chetna Award.
- Contribution: Advocacy for gender rights in Kashmir.

Arun Kapur Honoured with Bhutan's Prestigious Red Scarf and 'Dasho' Title

- ★ Indian educationist Arun Kapur has been recognized for his outstanding contributions to education in India, Bhutan, and Oman.
- ★ At the 117th Bhutanese National Day celebrations held at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu, Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel bestowed upon Kapur the prestigious Red Scarf and the honorary title 'Dasho', a distinction rarely conferred upon non-residents.
- ★ Kapur received the 'Bura Marp' (red scarf) and 'Patang' (ceremonial sword), symbols of high honor in Bhutan.
- ★ The title 'Dasho', traditionally reserved for senior Bhutanese officials, underscores the exceptional nature of this accolade for a non-resident.
- ★ This recognition highlights Kapur's contributions to Bhutan's educational development and his role in fostering bilateral educational ties.
- ★ Kapur played a pivotal role in establishing The Royal Academy, which focuses on holistic education and nurturing future leaders.

Caitlin Sandra Neil Crowned Miss India USA 2024

- ★ Caitlin Sandra Neil, a 19-year-old Indian-American born in Chennai, India, has been crowned Miss India USA 2024 at the annual pageant held in New Jersey.
- ★ Currently a second-year student at the University of California, Davis, Caitlin aspires to empower women and promote literacy while pursuing her dreams in web design, modeling, and acting.
- ★ She was born in Chennai, India and has lived in the USA for the past 14 years.
- ★ Mrs. India USA 2024: Sanskriti Sharma (Illinois).
- ★ Miss Teen India USA 2024: Arshita Kathpalia (Washington).
- ★ The event was organized by India Festival Committee (IFC).
- ★ Forty-seven contestants representing 25 states participated in the event.

Kuwait Confers Its Highest Honour on Prime Minister Narendra Modi

- ★ Kuwait has awarded its highest accolade, the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer, to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his leadership and dedication to strengthening relations between India and Kuwait.
- ★ The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer is a prestigious knighthood order instituted in 1974.
- ★ It was presented by Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah at the Bayan Palace in Kuwait.
- ★ PM Modi's visit marks the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait in 43 years.

- ★ The award underscores the depth of historic ties and ongoing collaboration in key sectors between India and Kuwait.
- ★ It is a testament to the mutual respect and growing partnership between the two nations.

Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi National Eminence Award

- ★ External Affairs Minister Jaishankar received the Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi National Eminence Award for Public Leadership from the South Indian Education Society (SIES) for his exceptional contributions to India's foreign policy and global leadership.
- ★ Jaishankar reflected on Maha Periyavar's teachings, particularly the message of universal brotherhood conveyed through the musical composition Maithreem Bhajatham.
- ★ He emphasized Periyavar's global connections and their influence on India's vision for international relations and diplomacy.
- ★ He highlighted India's emergence as a self-reliant and assertive global power, especially in championing the Global South and taking a firm stance against terrorism.
- ★ It referenced India's pivotal role in supporting the African Union's inclusion in the G20 and its advocacy for pressing global issues.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

President of ADB

- ★ The Board of Governors of the multilateral Asian Development Bank announced on 28 November 2024 that Masato Kanda of Japan has been elected as the 11th President of the Bank.
- ★ Masato Kanda will replace the current President, Masatsugu Asakawa, who will leave his office on 23 February 2025.
- ★ Currently, 59-year-old Masato Kanda is a Special Advisor to Japan's Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.
- ★ Masato Kanda will assume office on 24 February 2025.
- ★ The term of the ADB President is five years, and is eligible for re-election.
- ★ Masato Kanda will remain in office till 23 November 2026.
- ★ The bank's Board of Governors elects the President of the ADB. The Finance Minister of the member country represents the country on the Board, with a senior bureaucrat as an Alternate Governor.
- ★ Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman represents India on the Board of Governors, and Ajay Seth is the Alternate Governor.

Rashmika Mandanna Named National Brand Ambassador for Cyber Safety

- ★ Actress Rashmika Mandanna has been appointed as the national brand ambassador for the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C).

- ★ I4C is an initiative by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to combat cyber crimes.
- ★ Rashmika Mandanna will lead nationwide cyber awareness campaigns to educate the public on various cyber crimes, including deepfake technology.
- ★ In 2023, Rashmika Mandanna was a victim of a deepfake video, which brought attention to the importance of digital safety.

SBI Mutual Fund Appoints Nand Kishore as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer

- ★ Nand Kishore has been appointed as the Managing Director (MD) & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SBI Funds Management.
- ★ He replaces Shamsheer Singh in this role.
- ★ Prior to his appointment, Nand Kishore was serving as the Deputy Managing Director (Global Markets) at SBI's Corporate Centre in Mumbai, where he was responsible for overseeing the bank's treasury operations.
- ★ Kishore has over 34 years of experience working with SBI across major banking verticals such as Branch Banking, International Operations, Treasury Operations and Investment Banking, Corporate Banking and Retail Operations.
- ★ He began his career at the SBI as a Probationary Officer in 1990 and moved up the ranks to become Deputy Managing Director.

Chairman of the International Cricket Council

- ★ Jay Shah officially took over as the Chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) on December 1, 2024, at the age of 36, making him the youngest-ever ICC Chairman.
- ★ Shah replaces Greg Barclay, the outgoing New Zealand lawyer, who did not seek a third consecutive term.
- ★ Shah is the 5th Indian to hold the position, following prominent figures like Jagmohan Dalmiya, Sharad Pawar, Shashank Manohar, and N Srinivasan.
- ★ His selection as Chairman was unanimous by the ICC Board of Directors.
- ★ It is unclear who will replace Shah as the BCCI Secretary.
- ★ However, India will likely be represented on the ICC Board by either current President Roger Binny or Vice-President Rajiv Shukla.
- ★ Arun Dhumal, Ashish Shelar, and Devajit Lon Saikia are among the names being considered for the BCCI Secretary's post.

5th and 1st Female President of Namibia

- ★ Namibia made history when it elected its first Woman President, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah. The current Vice President will succeed the interim President, Nangolo Mbumba.
- ★ Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was promoted to Vice President in February this year after President Hage Geingob died in office.

- ★ According to the Namibian Electoral Commission, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah secured 57% of the votes, while her closest rival, Panduleni Itula, got 26%.
- ★ Once sworn in, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah will be the second woman to be the President of Africa. Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania is currently Africa's only female President.
- ★ An election was held in Namibia on 27 November 2024 to elect a new President and 96 members of the National Assembly of the Namibian Parliament.
- ★ The President is directly elected by the people, and the term of the President is five years.

Chief Minister of Maharashtra

- ★ Devendra Fadnavis is set to take oath as the Chief Minister of Maharashtra for the third time.
- ★ Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena) and Ajit Pawar (NCP) will take oath as Deputy Chief Ministers.
- ★ The event follows intense political discussions, with Fadnavis, Shinde, and Pawar staking their claim to form the Mahayuti Government.
- ★ The alliance presented letters of support to Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan.
- ★ Devendra Fadnavis was unanimously elected as the Leader of the Maharashtra BJP Legislative Party.
- ★ The swearing-in ceremony will be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Ministers from various NDA states.
- ★ The alliance is referred to as a "double engine Government", aiming to drive Maharashtra's development, as stated by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during the legislative meeting.

RBI Representative on the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India Board

- ★ The Government has appointed Vaibhav Chaturvedi as an ex-officio member of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).
- ★ Chaturvedi is currently serving as the Chief General Manager at the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- ★ This appointment highlights the RBI's continued involvement in the insolvency ecosystem, strengthening its collaboration with other regulatory and enforcement agencies.
- ★ As the RBI representative, Chaturvedi will support IBBI's efforts to ensure smooth and transparent resolution processes under the IBC.
- ★ The goal is to resolve stressed assets and enhance credit discipline in the financial sector.

26th Governor of RBI

- ★ The Revenue Secretary, Union Ministry of Finance, Sanjay Malhotra, has been appointed the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- ★ He will assume office on 11 December 2024 after the incumbent Governor, Shaktikanta Das, retires on 10 December 2024.
- ★ The Appointment Committee of the Union Cabinet approved Sanjay Malhotra's appointment as Governor of RBI on 9 December 2024.

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired the meeting, which was attended by the Union Minister for Home Affairs and Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah.
- ★ Sanjay Malhotra has been appointed for three years, starting 11 December 2024. The Central Government can dismiss him before the completion of his tenure, or he can resign from his office.
- ★ Under section 8 of the Reserve Bank of India Act 1934, the Central Government appoints the Governor and four Deputy Governors of the RBI.
- ★ According to the RBI Act 1934, the Governor or the Deputy Governor can be appointed for a maximum term of five years and is eligible for reappointment.
- ★ Sanjay Malhotra is an IAS Officer of the 1990 batch of the Rajasthan Cadre who assumed the office of Revenue Secretary on December 1, 2022.

Interim Prime Minister of Syria

- ★ The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS rebels in Syria, appointed Mohammad al-Bashir as the transitional Prime Minister of Syria on 10 December 2024 after Bashar al-Assad's Government fell on 8 December 2024.
- ★ Mohammad al-Bashir will remain the head of the transitional Government in Syria until 1st March 2025.
- ★ Mohammad al-Bashir is part of the rebel jihadist organisation HTS that swept into the capital, Damascus, on 8 December 2024, bringing to an end five decades of rule by Assad's family.
- ★ Syrian President Bashar al-Assad fled from the country and is believed to be in Moscow, Russia, which was the biggest supporter of the Assad Government and maintains a military base in the country.

New President of Ghana

- ★ Former President and opposition candidate John Mahama was elected as the President of the African country of Ghana in the recently held Presidential election.
- ★ Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang was elected as the Vice-President of the country. She is the first woman to be elected as the Vice-President of Ghana.
- ★ John Mahama will succeed the incumbent President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, on 7 January 2025.
- ★ John Mahama was elected as he secured 56.6% of the votes compared to 41.6% secured by Mahamudu Bawumia.
- ★ John Mahama was first elected as the President of Ghana in 2012 but lost the 2016 Presidential elections to Nana Akufo-Addo.

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of TransUnion CIBIL

- ★ Bhavesh Jain has been appointed as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer (MD and CEO) of TransUnion CIBIL, replacing Rajesh Kumar, who resigned after a five-year tenure.
- ★ Prior to his appointment, Bhavesh Jain held the position of Chief Revenue Officer at TransUnion CIBIL.

- ★ Jain has a strong background with prior experience at Thomson Reuters, Citi, and Kone.
- ★ Bhavesh Jain is focused on driving sustainable access to credit, enhancing financial inclusion, and promoting ease of doing business in India.
- ★ President of TransUnion International: Todd Skinner.

President of Georgia

- ★ Former footballer Mikheil Kavelashvili was elected as the new President of Georgia on 14 December, 2024.
- ★ Mikheil Kavelashvili, who played football for the Georgian national team and various European club teams, was elected unopposed as the President as the opposition boycotted the election.
- ★ The pro-Russian and anti-west Mikheil Kavelashvili will replace the pro-western incumbent President Salome Zourabichvili. President Salome Zourabichvili has condemned the election of Mikheil Kavelashvili.
- ★ Mikheil Kavelashvili will be sworn in as the Georgian President on 29 December 2024.
- ★ Mikheil Saakashvili, who came to power after the Rose Revolution, followed a pro-West and anti-Russia policy.
- ★ Parliamentary election was held on 26 October 2024, and the ruling party, with 54 % of the votes, secured 89 seats in the 150-member Georgian Parliament.

Google Names Preeti Lobana as Country Manager And Vice President for India

- ★ Preeti Lobana has been appointed as the new Country Manager and Vice President for Google India.
- ★ She succeeds Sanjay Gupta, who transitioned to the role of President for the Asia Pacific region at Google.
- ★ Lobana will collaborate with Roma Datta Chobey, who will continue her leadership role as the Managing Director for Google India's Digital Native Industries after serving as interim country Manager.
- ★ Lobana will lead Google's strategy to leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Indian customers and promote innovation.
- ★ She will focus on driving sales and operations in India, contributing to the country are growing digital economy.
- ★ Lobana is an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad.
- ★ She brings over 30 years of experience in senior leadership roles across the technology and financial sectors.
- ★ She has been with Google for 8 years, most recently serving as the Vice President of customer-centric solutions.

Group President of Human Resources at Reliance Industries Limited

- ★ Mukesh Ambani, the richest Asian, appointed Ira Bindra as the Group President of Human Resources at Reliance Industries Limited (RIL).

- ★ Ira Bindra will oversee the people, leadership, and talent functions at RIL, focusing on driving transformation across the entire organization.
- ★ Her appointment is expected to lead to unprecedented HR transformation at RIL, aligning with the company's focus on evolving its people policies.
- ★ Ira Bindra will be the first non-family woman to join the Executive Committee of Reliance Industries.
- ★ She is also the youngest person to be appointed to this prestigious position.

First Female President of Namibia

- ★ Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah has been elected as Namibia's first Female President, securing 57% of the vote in the November 27, 2024 election.
- ★ Nandi-Ndaitwah represents Namibia's ruling party, SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization), which has been in power since Namibia's independence in 1990.
- ★ She defeated Panduleni Itula of the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC), who garnered 26% of the vote.

President of Asian Development Bank

- ★ Masato Kanda has been elected as the 11th President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB).
- ★ Kanda, aged 59, is currently serving as Special Advisor to Japan's Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.
- ★ He will assume office as ADB President on February 24, 2025, succeeding Masatsugu Asakawa, whose term ends on February 23, 2025.
- ★ Kanda will complete the remainder of Asakawa's term, which runs until November 23, 2026.

9th Chairperson of NHRC

- ★ President Droupadi Murmu appointed former Supreme Court judge V Ramasubramanian as the 9th Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC).
- ★ President Droupadi Murmu also appointed Priyank Kanoongo and Dr. Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi (Retd.) as Members of the NHRC.
- ★ Justice (retd) V. Balasubramanian will succeed Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, who was performing the duty of acting chairperson of the NHRC.
- ★ Under the provisions of the Protection of Human Rights Act 1993, the Government of India established the National Human Rights Commission of India on 12 October 1993.
- ★ Similarly, every State Government has also set up the State Human Rights Commission under the provisions of the Protection of Human Rights Act 1993.
- ★ The NHRC consists of a Chairperson who has been a retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court or a retired Judge of the Supreme Court.

President of Moldova

- ★ Ms Maia Sandu was sworn in as the President of the European country of Moldova for her second term of four years on 24 December 2024.
- ★ Ms Maia Sandu first became the President of Moldova in 2020. She is the first woman to become the President of the country after it gained Independence in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- ★ According to the constitution of Moldova, a person can be the President of the country for two terms of four years each.
- ★ During her rule, the country moved away from Russia and sought closer ties with the European Union. In 2022, Moldova applied for membership in the 27-nation European Union.
- ★ The presidential election was held in Moldova on 20 October 2024. Along with the Presidential election, a referendum was also held in the country on whether to join the European Union.
- ★ 50.35%, of the voters, favoured joining the European Union.
- ★ However, no candidate was able to secure a 50% vote in the Presidential election. Hence a run-off election was held in November 2024, contested by the top two candidates.
- ★ In the run-off election, 52-year-old former World Bank advisor Maia Sandu of the Action and Solidarity party was declared elected with 55.33% of the vote.

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Jammu and Kashmir Bank

- ★ Amitava Chatterjee has been appointed as the Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Bank for a period of three years, effective from December 30, 2024.
- ★ Chatterjee will succeed Baldev Prakash, whose term ends on December 29, 2024.
- ★ Prior to this appointment, Amitava Chatterjee was serving as the Deputy Managing Director (DMD) at State Bank of India (SBI).
- ★ He has also held the position of MD & CEO of SBICAPS (State Bank of India Capital Markets).

Chairperson of NABL-QCI

- ★ Government of India has appointed Dr Sandip Shah as the Chairperson of the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL).
- ★ Dr Shah succeeds Prof. Subbanna Ayyappan who conceptualised and launched India's first Drive-through COVID testing facility.
- ★ The NABL is a constituent of the Quality Council of India (QCI) that works to improve the quality of testing and calibration services, ensuring trust in the products and services used by consumers, businesses, and regulators.
- ★ Dr Sandip Shah is a Gold Medalist in MD Pathology and Bacteriology from B.J. Medical College, Ahmedabad.
- ★ He is an expert in pathology, transplant immunology and molecular biology.
- ★ He is the honorary Director at the Institute of Kidney Diseases and Research Center and is the Joint Managing Director at Neuberg Diagnostics.

SPORTS

2024 Syed Modi International Badminton Tournament

- ★ The Indian badminton ace PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen, respectively, won the women's and men's titles of the 2024 Syed Modi International badminton tournament.
- ★ It was PV Sindhu's first BWF title since the 2022 Singapore Open title.
- ★ The USD 2.10 Lakh prize money BWF (Badminton World Federation) World Tour 300 Syed Modi International badminton tournament was held at the Babu Banarsi Das Indoor Stadium in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh from 26 November -1 December 2024.
- ★ In the final, Lakshya Sen defeated Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh 21-6, 21-7.
- ★ PV Sindhu defeated Chinese player Wu Luo Yu 21-14, 21-16 in the final to win Syed Modi International Badminton singles title.

2nd Indian Chess Player to Achieve 2800 Elo Rating

- ★ Grand Master Arjun Erigasi has become the second Indian chess player and 16th in the world to achieve 2800 Elo rating points in classical chess.
- ★ The 21-year-old Indian is the second India after Vishwanathan Anand to achieve 2800 Elo rating points.
- ★ The 21-year-old Arjun Erigasi is currently ranked number 4 by FIDE, after Grand Master Magnus Carlsen, Grand Master Fabiano Caruana, and Grand Master Hikaru Nakamura.
- ★ He won the individual gold medal at the 45th FIDE Chess Olympiad, held in Budapest, Hungary, from 10 to 23 September 2024.
- ★ Erigasi was also instrumental in the Indian men's team performance which won the gold at the 45th Chess Olympiad.
- ★ Elo rating was devised by an American Physics Professor and chess player, Arpad Elo.
- ★ The Elo rating system has been designed to rate the strength of a chess player.
- ★ The Elo rating system was officially adopted by FIDE in 1970.

20th Asian Women's Handball Championship 2024

- ★ The 20th Asian Women's Handball Championships 2024 commenced in New Delhi on 3rd December 2024.
- ★ This is the first time that India is hosting the Asian Women's Handball Championships.
- ★ The 19th Asian Women's Handball Championships 2022 was held in the South Korean cities of Incheon and Seoul from 24 November to 4 December 2022, which South Korea won.
- ★ The 20th edition of the Championships was to be held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, but was later shifted to India.

- ★ The Asian Women's Handball Championship is a flagship event of the Asian Handball Federation, the sport's governing body in Asia.
- ★ The Asian Handball Federation organises the Championships, and a member federation hosts the event.
- ★ The 20th Asian Women's Handball Championships will be held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, New Delhi, from 3-10 December 2024.

Asian Esports Games

- ★ Pavan Kampelli won the first-ever medal for India in the Asian Esports Games.
- ★ Pavan Kampelli also nicknamed "Mr Tomboy", won a bronze medal in the e-football event at the 2024 Asian Esports Games in Bangkok, Thailand.
- ★ The Asian Esports Games 2024 were held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 25 November to 1 December 2024.
- ★ Esports is becoming popular in the world, where players play games over the internet through electronic devices like mobile phones, gaming consoles etc.
- ★ The International Olympic Committee will host the inaugural Olympic Esports Games in Saudi Arabia in 2025.
- ★ Pavan Kampelli won a historic bronze medal for India in the e-football event. He defeated 2022 eFootball World Finals Winner (Mobile), Asgard Azizi of Indonesia, 2-1, to win the bronze medal.
- ★ Pawan Kampelli won a \$ 500 cash prize for his bronze medal win in the Games.

ACC U19 Men's Asia Cup Title at Dubai

- ★ Bangladesh defeated India by 59 runs in the 11th ACC U19 Men's Asia Cup Final in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on 8 December 2024 to successfully defend its title.
- ★ Bangladesh, which won the previous edition in 2023, clinched its second consecutive U19 Men's Asia Cup title.
- ★ The ACC U19 Men's Asia Cup is for male cricketers below 19.
- ★ Indian captain Mohammed Amaan won the toss and put Bangladesh in.
- ★ The Bangladeshi team scored 198 all out in their allotted 50 overs, with contributions from Mohammad Shihab James (40), Rizan Hossan (47) and Farid Hasan (39).
- ★ From India, pace duo of Yudhajit Guha and Chetan Sharma, spinner Hardik picked two wickets each.
- ★ Player of the Final match: Iqbal Hossain Emon (Bangladesh)
- ★ Player of the Tournament: Iqbal Hossain Emon (Bangladesh)

Guwahati Masters 2024 Badminton Singles Title

- ★ Indian badminton player Sathish Karunakaran won the BWF Super 100 Guwahati Masters 2024 badminton singles titles.

- ★ In the doubles, the defending champion Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto successfully defended their title by beating the Chinese pair in the final.
- ★ The \$100,000 lakh prize money BWF Super 100 Guwahati Masters 2024 was held in Guwahati, Assam, from 3 to 8 December 2024.
- ★ It was the second BWF Super 100 Guwahati Masters after the inaugural edition of 2023.
- ★ The BWF Super 100 Guwahati Masters 2024 was organised jointly by the Badminton Association of India and the Assam Badminton Association.
- ★ The event mainly provides exposure to the young and emerging badminton talent.
- ★ Satish Karunakaran won his second Super 100 badminton title at Guwahati by defeating Zhu Xuan Chen of China, 21-17, 21-14 in the final played on 8 December 2024.
- ★ The Indian women duo of Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto successfully defended their doubles title by defeating the Chinese pair of Li Hua Zhou and Wang Zi Meng 21-18, 21-12 in the final.

WTA Player of the Year 2024

- ★ Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus was voted WTA (Women Tennis Association) Player of the Year for 2024.
- ★ This is the first time Aryna Sabalenka has won the WTA Player of the Year award.
- ★ The international tennis media, accredited by the women's professional tennis governing body WTA, votes to select the best players, tournaments, and coaches of the year after the conclusion of the WTA calendar year.
- ★ Apart from Aryna Sabalenka, the Italian doubles duo of Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini were voted the Doubles Team of the Year.
- ★ Emma Navarro of the United States was voted the most improved player on the WTA circuit in 2024.
- ★ New Zealand's women's tennis professional player Lulu Sun was voted the WTA Newcomer of the Year.
- ★ Women's Tennis Association (WTA) was founded by legendary tennis player Billie Jean King in 1973.
- ★ It is the world governing body of women tennis professional players.
- ★ It organises the WTA World Tour, which includes over 50 tournaments and the four Grand Slams: the Australian Open, the French Open, Wimbledon, and the US Open.

FIDE World Chess Championship 2024

- ★ Indian Grandmaster D. Gukesh (18) secured a critical victory against defending champion Ding Liren (32) of China in Game 11 of the 2024 FIDE World Chess Championship held in Singapore.
- ★ With this win, Gukesh now leads the championship 6-5 with only three games remaining.
- ★ The defending champion collapsed under pressure, giving Gukesh his first lead in the championship.
- ★ The championship remains intense as Ding attempts to equalize.

- ★ Matches will continue at the World Resorts Sentosa in Singapore.

Khelo India Winter Games 2025

- ★ The Union Territory of Ladakh and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will jointly host the Khelo India Winter Games 2025.
- ★ The 2024 edition of the Khelo India Winter Games was also co-hosted by Ladkah and Jammu and Kashmir.
- ★ Before 2024, the Khelo India Winter Games was only held at Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir.
- ★ The 2025 Khelo India Winter Games will be important for athletes as it will also be a selection event for the forthcoming Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics in Italy in February 2026.
- ★ Bihar will host the Khelo India Youth and Para Games in April 2025.
- ★ Khelo India Winter Games is different from the National Winter Games. The Indian Olympic Association organises the National Games, and Uttarakhand will host the next National Winter Games.
- ★ The Khelo India Winter Games 2025 will be held in two phases, and a total of six events will take place.
- ★ In the first phase of the Winter Games, Leh in Ladakh will hold ice events – ice hockey and ice skiing from 23-27 January 2025.
- ★ In the second phase of the Games, Gulmarg, Jammu and Kashmir will host snow events – alpine skiing, Nordic skiing, ski mountaineering and snowboarding from 22-25 February 2025.

FIDE World Chess Champion

- ★ 18-year-old Gukesh Dommaraju, or D. Gukesh of Chennai, defeated the Chinese Grandmaster (GM) Ding Liren to become the youngest FIDE World Chess Champion.
- ★ D. Gukesh broke the record of the legendary Russian chess player Gary Kasparov, who became the world champion at the age of 22 years in 1985 after beating fellow Russian Anatoly Karpov.
- ★ The FIDE World Chess Championship is played in the classical chess format, and the first contestant to win 7.5 points is crowned the world champion.
- ★ D. Gukesh won the FIDE World Chess Championship by 7.5 points, compared to Ding Liren's 6.5 points.
- ★ D. Gukesh is the 18th chess player to be crowned FIDE World Chess Champion.
- ★ He is also the second Indian to become the world chess champion after Viswanathan Anand.
- ★ The total prize money for the 2024 FIDE World Championship was \$2.5 million. Each victory in the championship games fetched the victor \$200,000.
- ★ Gukesh's three wins got him \$600,000, while Ding Liren, with two wins, got \$ 400,000.
- ★ The remaining \$1.5 million was split between Gukesh and Ding.
- ★ Thus, Gukesh got a prize of \$1.35 million.

2034 Men's FIFA World Cup

- ★ The world football governing body FIFA has awarded the 25th FIFA Men's Football World Cup to Saudi Arabia.
- ★ The decision to award the 2034 FIFA Men's Football World Cup was taken at the Extraordinary FIFA Congress held in Zurich, Switzerland, on 12 December 2024.
- ★ All 211 members of FIFA attended the Extraordinary Congress virtually.
- ★ Saudi Arabia was the sole country in the race to host the 2034 FIFA Men's World Cup.
- ★ The 23rd FIFA Men's World Cup will be co-hosted by Mexico, Canada and the United States in 2026, and 48 teams will participate in the tournament.
- ★ This is the first time that Saudi Arabia will host the FIFA Men's World Cup. Saudi Arabia has proposed to hold the 25th World Cup matches in 15 stadiums in five cities.

2024 Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy

- ★ Mumbai, led by Shreyas Iyer, defeated Madhya Pradesh to win the 2024-25 season Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.
- ★ In the final played at the Chinnaswamy stadium, Bengaluru, Mumbai defeated Madhya Pradesh by 5 wickets to win their second Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.
- ★ The Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy is a domestic championship organised by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and is played in the T20 format.
- ★ The 2024-25 Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy was held from 23 November to 15 December 2024 across various venues in India. The final was played at the Chinnaswamy stadium in Bengaluru on 15 December 2024.
- ★ The victory over Madhya Pradesh in Bengaluru was the second title win for the Mumbai team. Mumbai had earlier won the Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy in the 2022-23 seasons by defeating Himachal Pradesh.
- ★ Batting first, Madhya Pradesh scored 174 runs for the loss of 8 wickets in their allotted 20 overs. Madhya Pradesh Captain Rajat Patidar was the highest scorer for his team with an unbeaten knock of 81 runs.
- ★ Player of the Match: Suryansh Shedge (Mumbai)
- ★ Player of the Tournament: Ajinkaya Rahane (Mumbai)

Odisha Masters 2024 Badminton Men's Singles Title

- ★ Rithvik Sanjeevi Satish Kumar won the men's single title of the 2024 BWF Super100 Odisha Masters badminton tournament on 15 December 2024.
- ★ Rithvik was the sole Indian winner in the Odisha Masters, which was dominated by the Chinese players, who won three titles, and the Japanese claimed the women's doubles title.
- ★ The \$100,000 lakh prize money BWF Super 100 Odisha Masters 2024 was held in Cuttack, Odisha, from 10-15 December 2024.

- ★ It was the third edition of the BWF Super 100 Odisha Masters after the inaugural edition in 2021 and 2023.
- ★ The BWF Super 100 Odisha Masters 2024 was organised jointly by the Badminton's governing body in India, the Badminton Association of India and the Odisha Badminton Association.
- ★ 21-year-old Rithvik Sanjeevi Satish Kumar, ranked 78th in the world, defeated fellow Indian Tharun Mannepalli in the finals to win the men's singles title of the Odisha Masters.

TT Waldner Cup 2024 in Norway

- ★ Team Asia won the inaugural Waldner Cup 2024 Table Tennis tournament, defeating Team World 14-10.
- ★ Manika Batra was the only Indian player to be included in the Team Asia team.
- ★ The Waldner Cup has been instituted by Swedish table tennis great Jan-Ove Waldner.
- ★ It was an invitational tournament approved by the Norwegian Table Tennis Association.
- ★ The Waldner Cup was held in Oslo, Norway, from 13-15 December 2024.
- ★ Team Asia comprised Manika Batra of India, six-time Olympic gold medallist Ma Long of China, two-time Olympic bronze medallist Shin Yubin of South Korea and Kirill Gerassimenko of Kazakhstan.
- ★ The Team World consisted of 2024 Paris Olympics men's singles silver medallist Truls Moregardh of Sweden, six-time Olympic medallist Dimitrij Ovtcharov of Germany, Hugo Calderano of Russia, Adriana Diaz of Puerto Rico and Bernadette Szocs of Romania.

Ravichandran Ashwin Retire from International Cricket

- ★ One of the all-time greats of India, Ravichandran Ashwin, announced his retirement from all forms of international cricket on 18 December 2024.
- ★ The unexpected retirement announcement came after the third test of the 2024-25 Border Ashwin started his first-class career for Tamil Nadu in a Ranji Trophy Match against Haryana in Chennai in December 2006.
- ★ His first match for India was a One Day Internationals (ODI) against Sri Lanka at Harare (Zimbabwe) in June 2010.
- ★ His first Test match for India was against Sri Lanka in Delhi in June 2011.
- ★ He was an off-spinner with a good lower-order batsman.
- ★ Gavaskar Trophy in Brisbane ended in a draw.
- ★ In the 106 Test matches Ashwin played for India, India won 61 Test matches. Only Sachin Tendulkar (72) and Virat Kohli (62) have featured in more test victories for India.
- ★ Ashwin has never missed a Test match played in India since his debut in 2011. Of the 65 Test matches he played in India, India has won 47 Tests. Only great Sachin Tendulkar has featured in 52 home Test wins.
- ★ Ashwin took 537 Test wickets in his career, and 374 wickets came in victories. He is the only Indian bowler to claim over 300 wickets in Test wins.

New Delhi to Host 2025 Boxing Cup Final and 3rd World Boxing Congress

- ★ For the first time, India will host the World Boxing Cup Final and the World Boxing Congress in 2025 in New Delhi.
- ★ The Boxing Federation of India, the sport's governing body in India, will host the World Boxing Cup Final and the 3rd World Boxing Congress in New Delhi in November 2025.
- ★ India was awarded the right to these two events by World Boxing, which is seen as recognition of India's importance in the world in the sport of boxing.
- ★ World Cup Boxing Cup Final is a year-end tournament for the elite men and women boxers and is usually held in November /December of the calendar year.
- ★ Senior male and female boxers participate in three major ranking tournaments named 'Boxing World Cups', which are organised by the World Boxing and hosted by a member of the national boxing federations.
- ★ Based on their performance in these World Cups, boxers are awarded points. The top-ranked boxers are eligible for the season-ending finale- World Boxing Cup Final.
- ★ In 2025, the three Boxing World Cups will be held in Brazil in March, followed by events in Germany and Kazakhstan.
- ★ World Boxing Congress is the annual meeting of national boxing federations of World Boxing, where the issues related to the sports, organisation and other masters are discussed.
- ★ India is going to host the third World Boxing Congress in 2025.

India to host 12th World Para Athletics Championships in 2025

- ★ India will, for the first time, host the prestigious World Para Athletics Championships in 2025. Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium, in the Indian capital city of New Delhi, will be the venue of the 12th World Para Athletics Championships, to be held in September/October 2025.
- ★ The World Para Athletics announced the schedule of the 2025 World Para Athletics Championships and the World Para Athletics Grand Prix calendar 2025 on 19 December 2024.
- ★ The hosting of these international sporting events will showcase Indian abilities to organise major sporting events and will also strengthen India's bid to host the 2036 summer and Paralympics Games.
- ★ New Delhi is the fourth Asian city to host the World Para Athletics Championships.
- ★ The World Para Athletics has also awarded the World Para Athletics Grand Prix to New Delhi. It will be held at the Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium from 11-13 March 2025.
- ★ The World Para Athletics, a part of the International Paralympic Committee, organises the World Para Athletics Championships.

ACC Women's U19 Asia Cup 2024

- ★ The Indian women's cricket team led by Niki Prasad won the inaugural Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Women's U19 Asia Cup 2024 title by beating Bangladesh's team by 41 runs in the final.
- ★ The final of the tournament was played on 22 December 2024 at the Bayuemas Cricket Oval, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia.

- ★ The Indian women's team avenged the defeat of the Indian men's team which lost the final of the 11th ACC U19 Men's Asia Cup to Bangladesh.
- ★ All matches of the tournament were played at the Bayuemas Oval cricket ground in Kuala Lumpur.
- ★ India won the match with 41 runs.
- ★ Player of the final Match: Gongadi Trisha

2024 Sr National Badminton Champion

- ★ Karnataka's M. Raghu and Haryana's Devika Sihag won the men's and women's singles title respectively, at the 86th Senior National Badminton Championships 2024.
- ★ The 86th Senior National Badminton Championships was organised by the Badminton Association of India and hosted by Karnataka Badminton Association in Bengaluru, Karnataka from 20-24 December 2024.
- ★ In the 77th Inter-Zonal Badminton Championships 2024, the men's title was won by Karnataka while Haryana won the women's title.
- ★ In the final Karnataka team defeated Railways 3-1 to bag the Ibrahim Rahimtoola Cup. It was the second title for Karnataka after a gap of 47 years.
- ★ In the women's final Haryana beat Gujarat 3-2 in the final to lift the Gulab Rai Chadha Cup.

BOOKS & AUTHORS

Amitava Kumar's Novel, "My Beloved Life",

- ★ Amitava Kumar's novel, "My Beloved Life", captures the essence of ordinary lives intersecting with extraordinary historical and social transformations in India. Here's a breakdown:
- ★ The story revolves around Jadunath "Jadu" Kunwar, a peasant's son, and his daughter Jugnu.
- ★ Their lives reflect the trials, triumphs, and societal changes in India from pre-Independence to the pandemic era.
- ★ Jadu's journey from a rural Bihar village to becoming a History Professor and Fulbright scholar symbolizes resilience and ambition.
- ★ Jugnu's narrative captures her evolution from a journalist in Delhi to working with CNN in the U.S., grappling with personal and professional struggles.

IMPORTANT DAYS

National Pollution Control Day

- ★ National Pollution Control Day 2024 is observed on the 2nd of December 2024.

- ★ National Pollution Control Day is observed to create awareness about pollution which is causing harm to our environment and to living beings.
- ★ It is nationally observed for the remembrance of an Industrial accident that took place in Bhopal which took thousands of lives in 1984.
- ★ The Bhopal gas tragedy happened on the night of 2nd and 3rd December in the year 1984 because of the unintentional discharge of the poisonous chemical known as Methyl Isocyanate (also called MIC) as well as some other chemicals released from the Union Carbide Chemical Plant positioned in the city.
- ★ Nearly 25000 people died due to the release of Poisonous gas and it is reported as one of the biggest Industrial Pollution disasters that took place in history.

International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

- ★ International Day for the Abolition of Slavery 2024 is observed on the 2nd of December 2024.
- ★ The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery focuses on eradicating modern forms of slavery like trafficking, sexual exploitation, child labour, forced marriage, and forced recruitment of children into armed conflict.
- ★ The International Labor Organization puts the number of victims of modern slavery at 40 million worldwide.
- ★ From past times to the present, slavery has spanned various nations, civilizations, and religions. Similarly, victims of slavery hailed from a wide range of races and religious backgrounds.
- ★ ILO has adopted a legally binding Protocol designed to strengthen global efforts to eliminate forced labour, which entered into force in November 2016.

World Wildlife Conservation Day

- ★ World Wildlife Conservation Day is observed annually on December 4 to spread awareness about preserving Earth's endangered Flora and fauna.
- ★ The day aims to combat wildlife trafficking, a global issue costing \$7–10 billion annually.
- ★ The day spreads awareness about the benefits of wildlife and addresses the challenges of wildlife trafficking and habitat destruction.
- ★ Theme for the year 2024 is “Connecting People and Planet: Exploring Digital Innovation in Wildlife Conservation”

World Soil Day

- ★ World Soil Day is celebrated every year on December 5.
- ★ Objective is to highlight the vital role of soil in sustaining life and address the challenges of soil degradation.
- ★ It was initiated by the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) in 2002 and officially recognized by the United Nations in 2013.
- ★ The date honors King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, a proponent of sustainable soil management, coinciding with his birthday.

- ★ Theme for the year 2024 is “Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, Manage”

Armed Forces Flag Day

- ★ Armed Forces Flag Day 2024 is observed on the 7th of December 2024.
- ★ The idea of Armed Forces Flag Day observation every year was first decided in the year 1949 by the then Defence Minister.
- ★ He set up a committee to observe a Flag Day every year on December 7.
- ★ The general idea behind this was the collection of funds from people by distributing flags.
- ★ The Armed Forces Flag Day also called Flag Day of India is commemorated through the collection of funds through the distribution of flags.
- ★ Indian citizens express their gratitude to the country's ex-military and current military personnel and pay homage to those who died in service.

International Civil Aviation Day

- ★ International Civil Aviation Day 2024 is observed on the 7th of December 2024.
- ★ The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a specialist organization within the United Nations, established December 7 as the day to celebrate the impact that civil aviation has had on the world.
- ★ Tourism and business have both been changed forever due to flying, not to mention the cultural connections that have been enabled.
- ★ The first International Civil Aviation Day was held in 1994 as part of ICAO's 50th anniversary and in 1996 the United Nations General Assembly officially recognised 7 December as International Civil Aviation Day.

International Anti Corruption Day

- ★ International Anti-Corruption Day 2024 is observed on the 9th of December 2024.
- ★ Corruption has existed from time immemorial. Some of the earliest records of anti-corruptions texts can be found in the Code of Hammurabi of Babylonia, the Great Edict of Horemheb in Egypt, and Arthashastra in India.
- ★ These texts spoke about bribery practices among officers of the state and law.
- ★ The Concept of Public Interest and welfare began in the 19th Century. Corruption became a major topic of public interest decisions.
- ★ Bribes made officials and people compromise their quality of work and time and finally resulted in spreading to all kinds of people making society polluted.

Human Rights Day

- ★ Human Rights Day 2024 is observed on the 10th of December 2024.

- ★ The theme for Human Rights Day 2024 is 'Equality for All: Reducing Inequality and Advancing Human Rights.'
- ★ Human Rights Day's first observation was started in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- ★ The day was popular to all when the UN issued a Human Rights Stamp which covered and understood the concept by millions of people.
- ★ It was issued by the United Nations Postal Administration in 1952, which received over 200,000 advanced orders.
- ★ The aim of the Declaration of Human Rights is to establish a common standard of living for all people across the planet and to encourage all UN Members of State, to increase the standard of living among people in their respective countries.

Nobel Prize Day

- ★ Nobel Prize Day 2024 is observed on the 10th of December 2024.
- ★ Alfred Nobel's father was an engineer himself and Alfred Nobel expressed early interest in engineering, and explosives in particular.
- ★ Nobel became interested in stabilizing the unpredictable explosive nitroglycerin.
- ★ While conducting the experiments an unexpected accident took place which cost the life of his brother.
- ★ But Nobel continued his work ultimately succeeding in inventing dynamite as a superior and more stable version of nitroglycerin.
- ★ Alfred Nobel went on to invent an even better alternative to dynamite in the form of gelignite.
- ★ Later he re-evaluated his life's goals and decided to use his earnings to set up a prize that recognized the best in humanity.
- ★ The prizes in the different categories reflect his own interests in various fields.

International Mountain Day

- ★ International Mountain Day 2024 is observed on the 11th of December 2024.
- ★ Increasing climate variability resulted in a lack of mountain agriculture, so a lot of men migrated elsewhere in search of alternative livelihoods.
- ★ Women have therefore taken on many tasks formerly done by men, yet mountain women are often invisible due to a lack of decision-making power and unequal access to resources.
- ★ In the United States, there was a tradition where students skip classes and visit the nearby mountains and surround them for recreation.
- ★ This is a kind of celebration in the United States.
- ★ The United Nations General Assembly declared the International Year of Mountains in 2002.
- ★ The U.N. establishes December 11 as International Mountain Day each year for the protection and sustainability of mountains.
- ★ Mountain Day is established and celebrated in Japan as a national holiday for people.

Universal Health Coverage Day

- ★ Universal Health Coverage Day 2024 is observed on the 12th of December 2024.
- ★ This year's theme, "Health: It's on the Government", underscores the role Governments play in ensuring that no one is forced to choose between health care and necessities such as food
- ★ The first healthcare system was established by a German named Chancellor Otto von Bismarck in 1883.
- ★ The insurance model, called the 'Bismarckian system', required everyone to have insurance for their medical expenses, which was similar to the current-day non-profit health insurance companies.
- ★ Universal Health Coverage Day was originally promoted by the World Health Organization.

National Energy Conservation Day

- ★ National Energy Conservation Day 2024 is observed on the 14th of December 2024.
- ★ National Energy Conservation Day was first observed on December 14th, 1991 by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency BEE, under the Union Ministry of Power which falls under the Government of India.
- ★ The Bureau of Energy Efficiency assists in the development and implementation of strategies and policies to reduce excessive consumption of energy.
- ★ The committee also executed 'The Energy Conservation Act' in 2001.
- ★ The main objective of the day is to reduce the use of energy and to encourage people to use it efficiently.

International Migrants Day

- ★ International Migrants Day 2024 is observed on the 18th of December 2024.
- ★ Although the day was established in 2000, it has been observed since 1997 that several Asian migrant organizations designated December 18 as the day to advocate for the respect, rights, and protection of migrants.
- ★ On account of the ever-increasing number of migrants around the world, on December 4, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly declared December 18 as the day for International Migrants
- ★ Goals connected to migration are included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations. Among them is education access, which will result in improved prospects and a higher standard of living.

National Mathematics Day

- ★ National Mathematics Day 2024 is observed on the 22nd of December 2024.
- ★ The theme for National Mathematics Day 2024 is "Mathematics: Bridge to innovation".
- ★ The renowned mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, whose works had a widespread impact both in India and around the world, is the driving force behind the establishment of Mathematics Day in that country.

- ★ Ramanujan was born in 1887 to an Iyengar Brahmin family in Erode, Tamil Nadu. Despite having little formal schooling, he mastered trigonometry at the age of 12 and created a number of his own theorems.

Good Governance Day

- ★ Good Governance Day 2024 is observed on the 25th of December 2024.
- ★ Good Governance Day 2024 is observed for the birth anniversary of Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
- ★ Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a former Prime Minister, and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya were both named as recipients of the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honor, on December 23, 2014.
- ★ Following the declaration, the newly-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that December 25 would be observed as Good Governance Day.
- ★ Three times, Atal Bihari Vajpayee led India as Prime Minister.
- ★ In 1996, his first term lasted just 13 days.
- ★ He completed his second term from 1999 to 2004 after serving it for a total of thirteen months from March 1998 to April 1999. In 1962, he made his debut appearance in the Rajya Sabha. He won seven elections for the Lok Sabha.
- ★ Vajpayee received the Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian honor in India, in 2015.

OBITUARY NEWS

Ex-Australian Cricketer Ian Redpath

- ★ Ian Redpath, one of Australia's most respected opening batters, has passed away at the age of 83.
- ★ He was born in Geelong, Victoria.
- ★ Redpath played 66 Tests and 5 One-Day Internationals (ODIs) for Australia between 1964 and 1976.
- ★ Test Debut was against South Africa at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), where he was dismissed for 97 (just short of a century).
- ★ He scored 132 runs against West Indies at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 1969.
- ★ Redpath was the last Australian cricketer to play as an amateur, turning down his match fee in 1963-64 to focus on his amateur career in Australia Rules Football.
- ★ He served as deputy to both Ian and Greg Chappell during his career.

Aussie Davis Cup Legend Neale Fraser

- ★ Neale Fraser, who won three Grand Slam singles titles and guided Australia to four Davis Cup titles during a 24-year career as team captain, has passed away at the age of 91.

- ★ Neale Fraser was born on 3 October 1933 in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.
- ★ Fraser won the 1960 Wimbledon title, defeating Australian tennis great Rod Laver.
- ★ He was an iconic figure in Australian tennis, widely regarded for his contributions to both the sport and the Davis Cup.
- ★ His rivalry with Rod Laver, a fellow Australian tennis great, was notable, with Laver paying tribute to Fraser after his passing.
- ★ Grand Slam Achievements: Fraser won 19 Grand Slam titles, which included:
- ★ 2 singles titles: U.S. Open in 1959 and 1960, and Wimbledon in 1960.
- ★ 11 men's doubles titles, including at least two at each of the four Grand Slam tournaments.

Award-winning U.S. poet Nikki Giovanni Passed away

- ★ Nikki Giovanni, the charismatic and iconoclastic poet, activist, children's book Author and Professor who wrote, irresistibly and sensuously, about race, politics, gender, sex and love, passed away in Blacksburg at the age of 81.
- ★ Giovanni was a leading figure in the Black Arts Movement, which flourished between 1965 and 1974, alongside other notable figures like Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, and Audre Lorde.
- ★ Giovanni is best known for her poems 'Knoxville, Tennessee' and 'Nikki-Rosa'.
- ★ Her writing often focused on civil rights, race issues, and gender, reflecting her own experiences growing up in Tennessee and Ohio.
- ★ She was considered one of the most prolific African-American poets and played a significant role in Black culture and the Civil Rights Movement.
- ★ She received numerous awards, including the NAACP Image Award, the Rosa Parks Award, and the Langston Hughes Award for her contributions to the arts.
- ★ Giovanni was also nominated for a Grammy for Best Spoken Word Album for The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection in 2004.

Tabla Maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain

- ★ One of the best-known Tabla maestros of his generation, Ustad Zakir Hussain, died in San Francisco, the United States of America, on December 14, 2024. He was 73 years of age.
- ★ Ustad Zakir Hussain was admitted to the intensive care unit of a hospital in San Francisco and died due to complications arising out of idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.
- ★ Zakir Hussain was the son of the renowned Tabla maestro Ustad Allah Rakha Khan and was born in Mumbai on 9 March 1951.
- ★ From the age of seven years, Zakir Hussain started performing on stage as a Tabla player.
- ★ Zakir Hussain was one of the foremost Indian musicians who took Indian classical music to the world stage. He performed with music legends like sitarist Ravi Shankar, Sarod player Ali Akbar Khan, and Santoor player Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma.
- ★ Ustad Zakir Hussain also composed music for films.

- ★ He was the music composer of films like Manto and Mr and Mrs Iyer. He also made short appearances in films like Heat and Dust, Saaz and Perfect Murder.

Former Karnataka Chief Minister and Union Minister SM Krishna

- ★ Former Karnataka Chief Minister and Union Minister SM Krishna passed away at the age of 92.
- ★ SM Krishna served as the Chief Minister of Karnataka from October 11, 1999, to May 20, 2004.
- ★ He served as the Governor of Maharashtra from December 6, 2004, to March 8, 2008.
- ★ He was a delegate for India at the United Nations in 1982 and participated in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in New Zealand in 1965.
- ★ He was also a delegate at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar at Westminster in 1990.

Economic Historian Amiya Kumar Bagchi

- ★ Economic historian Amiya Kumar Bagchi passed away.
- ★ He is known for his work on underdevelopment and imperialism.
- ★ He authored books such as Private Investment in India 1900-1939, The Political Economy of Underdevelopment and Perilous Passage.
- ★ In the beginning, he was a mathematical economist and game theorist.
- ★ He later turned to economic history.
- ★ He was the official historian of the State Bank of India (SBI) from 1976 to 1998.
- ★ He was the Founder-Director of the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 2005.

14th Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh

- ★ The 14th Prime Minister of India and architect of Indian economic reform Dr Manmohan Singh, passed away on 26 December 2024 at the age of 92 years.
- ★ Dr Manomhan Singh was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), New Delhi, and was being treated for age-related medical conditions.
- ★ Dr Manmohan Singh was born on 26 September 1932 in Gah village in undivided Punjab (now in Pakistan).
- ★ He studied at Cambridge and Oxford University in the United Kingdom. He taught Economics at the Punjab University and the Delhi School of Economics.
- ★ He started his career with the Government of India in 1971 when he was appointed the Economic Advisor in the Ministry of Commerce.
- ★ Dr Manmohan Singh is known as the Chief Architect of the New Economic Policy which was introduced during the tenure of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao from 1991-96.
- ★ Under his stewardship, India undertook a series of economic reforms which is considered to be a turning point in the economic history of Independent India.

Legendary Filmmaker Shyam Benegal

- ★ Shyam Benegal, the renowned Indian filmmaker, passed away at the age of 90 in Mumbai.
- ★ Shyam Benegal was born on December 14, 1934, in Hyderabad, to a Konkani-speaking Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmin family.
- ★ Benegal was regarded as a pioneer of parallel cinema in India, especially during the 1970s and 1980s.
- ★ His works often broke away from traditional mainstream cinema and focused on social issues with a realistic portrayal.
- ★ Some of his iconic films include Ankur (1973), Nishant (1975), Mandi (1983), Manthan (1976), Bhumika (1977), Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero (2004), Zubeidaa (2001), and Well Done Abba (2010).
- ★ His films were known for their realism, social commentary, and significant contribution to parallel cinema in India.
- ★ He was awarded the Dadasaheb Phalke Award (2005), India's highest award in cinema.
- ★ He received the Padma Shri (1976) and Padma Bhushan (1991) from the Government of India.
- ★ He was also honored with the V. Shantaram Lifetime Achievement Award in 2018.

Architect of the Car Revolution in India Osamu Suzuki

- ★ Osamu Suzuki, founder and former Chairman of the Japanese company Suzuki Motor Corporation has died in Japan.
- ★ He was 94 years old and was suffering from lymphoma (a type of blood cancer).
- ★ Osamu Suzuki was also the Director and honourary Chairman of Maruti Suzuki India Limited.
- ★ Osamu Suzuki who headed the Suzuki Motor Limited, for more than 40 years, transformed the company into a global automaker and brought affordable mobility to millions in India with the Maruti 800 car.
- ★ He was instrumental in establishing the Maruti Suzuki Company in India which revolutionised the car industry in the country.
- ★ Osamu Suzuki invested in India when no foreign company was willing to invest in the country even the Japanese embassy in India was against the investment proposal.
- ★ However, his success in India led to further Japanese investment in the country.

Malayalam Writer and Jnanpith Awardee M.T. Vasudevan Nair

- ★ One of the most respected figures in Malayalam literature and cinema Madath Thekkepat Vasudevan Nair or M.T. Vasudevan Nair passed away at a hospital in Kozhikode, Kerala.
- ★ The Jnanpith awardee was 91 years old. The Kerala Government declared a two-day state mourning as a mark of respect for M.T. Vasudevan Nair.
- ★ He left behind a rich legacy in the fields of literature and film, with a career spanning more than seven decades.

- ★ Madath Thekkepat Vasudevan Nair was born in a Nair family in Kudallur village, Palakkad district of Kerala in 1934.
- ★ He also held the post of Chairman of the Thunchan Memorial Trust and Research Centre and the President of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi.
- ★ M.T. Vasudevan Nair won various national and state awards during his lifetime.
- ★ Padma Bhushan- India's third highest civilian award Padma Bhushan was conferred on him by the Government of India in 2005.
- ★ Kerala Jyothi Award- Kerala Government's highest award in 2022.
- ★ Jnanapith Award- India's highest literature prize Jnanpith in 1995

MISCELLANEOUS

Oxford Word of the Year 2024

- ★ The Oxford University Press (OUP) has declared 'brain rot' as the Oxford Word of the Year 2024, reflecting a societal focus on the consequences of excessive consumption of low-quality online content, particularly through social media.
- ★ This decision followed a global public vote involving over 37,000 participants, underscoring the phrase's resonance in contemporary discourse.
- ★ Primary Meaning: Refers to both the low-quality digital content pervasive on platforms like TikTok and the cognitive and emotional toll of consuming such material.
- ★ Cultural Relevance: Captures the zeitgeist of 2024, marked by widespread concerns about the mental health impacts of unchecked digital consumption.

Uber Launches 'Moto Women' in Bengaluru for Women-Only Bike Rides

- ★ Uber has introduced a new service in Bengaluru called Uber Moto Women, designed to offer women a safer, more comfortable commuting option by connecting female riders with female drivers.
- ★ It exclusively connects female riders with female drivers to address safety concerns and promote gender comfort.
- ★ Real-Time Trip Sharing: Riders can share their trip details with family or friends.
- ★ Phone Number Anonymization: Protects privacy during communications.
- ★ Ride Check: Detects irregularities in the journey, ensuring prompt intervention if needed.
- ★ Women drivers can opt to serve only female riders, offering them greater control and safety in their work environment.

