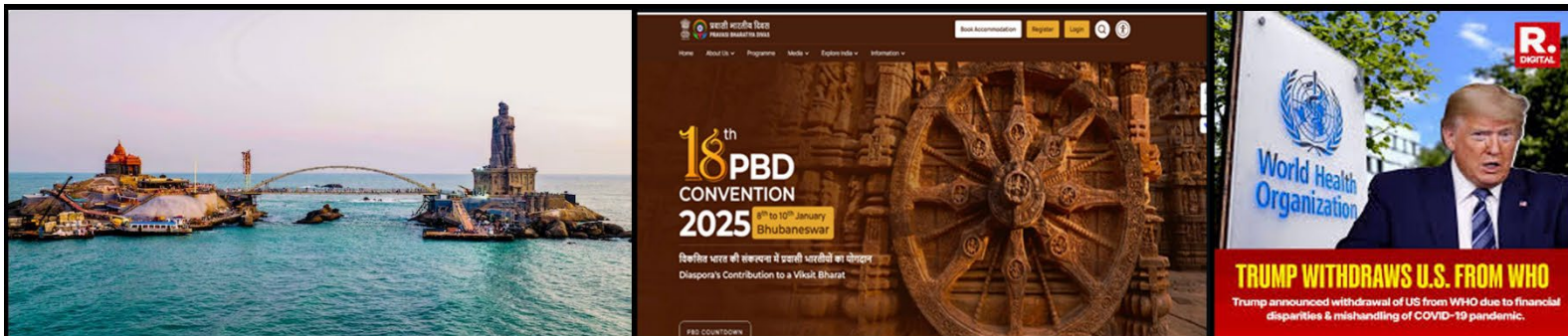




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The SPADEX Mission Consists of Two Small Spacecraft

Names :
SPADEX-A (SDX01) and SPADEX-B (SDX02)

Mass :
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Design :
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Capabilities :
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Record 16.73 billion UPI transactions in December

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS JANUARY 2ND, 2025



UPI transactions hit a record 16.73 billion in December 2024, showcasing India's growing digital payment adoption. This milestone reflects the efficiency, convenience, and trust in UPI for seamless financial transactions. In 2024, UPI processed 172 billion transactions.

संकल्प से शिखर तक

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JANUARY – 2025

NATIONAL NEWS

India's 1st Glass Bridge Over Sea in Kanyakumari

- ★ Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin inaugurated India's first glass bridge over the sea in Kanyakumari on 31st December 2024.
- ★ The glass bridge connects the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and the 133-foot Thiruvalluvar statue in the Kanyakumari district.
- ★ The glass bridges are made of laminated glass or toughened glass, are transparent, and are built in tourist places especially in the mountainous regions so that the tourists can experience breathtaking scenes.
- ★ The longest glass bridge in India is located in Vagamon, Kerala which is 40 meters long and at an altitude of 3600 feet.
- ★ The bridge in Kanyakumari is 77 meters long, 10 meters wide, and 133 feet high.
- ★ The tourists visiting these two tourist places used to take a ferry, but can now also walk over the glass bridge to visit these tourist places.
- ★ The 37-crore project to build the glass bridge is part of the State Government initiative to boost tourism in the area.

Gujarat Chief Minister Introduces 'SWAR' Platform

- ★ Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel launched the SWAR (Speech and Written Analysis Resource) platform on December 25, 2024, marking the occasion of Good Governance Day.
- ★ The SWAR platform is a citizen-centric initiative aimed at overcoming language barriers, especially in communication with the Government.
- ★ The platform was developed by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's Bhashini Team under the National Language Translation Mission (NLTM).
- ★ The platform uses technology to enable communication through voice, with a Speech-to-Text feature integrated into the Gujarat CMO website.
- ★ The SWAR platform utilizes the Bhashini artificial intelligence system, designed to facilitate language translation and voice-to-text functionality.
- ★ Citizens can now dictate their messages instead of typing them, which is particularly beneficial for those unfamiliar with English keyboards.
- ★ The platform allows citizens to easily submit applications or grievances through voice commands, making Government services more accessible to non-English speakers.

- ★ The platform aims to provide an inclusive, accessible communication channel for all citizens, particularly those from rural areas or who face difficulties with language barriers.

Government Extends Agriculture Crop Insurance Scheme Till 2025-26

- ★ In a boost to the agricultural sector in the country, the Government of India has approved several policy decisions including the extension of the major crop insurance scheme- Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.
- ★ The Government has also approved the creation of FIAT to fund research and development projects in the agricultural sector like YES-TECH, and WINDS.
- ★ The decision was taken in a meeting of the Union cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 1st January 2025.
- ★ The Central Government has extended the central sector crop insurance scheme -Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme by one year till 2025-26.
- ★ The total allocation for both the schemes from 2021-22 to 2025-26 is now ₹69,515.71 Crore.
- ★ Both schemes are a crop insurance scheme in which the insured farmers are compensated in case of crop failure under certain terms and conditions.
- ★ The only difference is that in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, the farmer is compensated for the crop loss due to unforeseen conditions.
- ★ In the Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme the farmer is insured against the loss of crops due to the incidence of adverse conditions of weather parameters like rainfall, temperature, frost, humidity, etc.

Maharashtra Government Launches 15-Day Reading Campaign Amongst Student

- ★ The Maharashtra Government has launched a 15-day “reading campaign amongst students” starting 1 January 2025. The scheme was announced by the Minister for Higher and Technical Education Minister of Maharashtra Government Chandrakant Patil.
- ★ The State Government has also set up committees at various levels that will oversee the reading campaign across the state.
- ★ The State Government has also announced that it will honour the winners of the various activities conducted by the State Government as part of the reading campaign.
- ★ The 15-day reading campaign will be under the Higher and Technical Education Department of the Maharashtra Government. It will be held every year from 1-15 January. It is part of the State Government’s effort to nurture a generation that values reading as a crucial aspect of intellectual and personal growth.
- ★ Apart from this the other aim of the campaign are as follows:
 - To motivate the students to read books other than their textbooks.
 - Discourage the excessive use of mobile, laptop etc.
 - Conduct group reading sessions, story-telling, book discussions, workshops, competitions, and book reviews.

India's First Coastal and Wader Bird Census in Jamnagar, Gujarat

- ★ India's first coastal and wader bird census will be conducted in the Marine National Park and Marine Sanctuary in Jamnagar, Gujarat from 3 -5 January 2025.
- ★ Wader birds are those birds which have long legs, long necks, and long bills that are adapted for wading in shallow waters and live on fish, frogs, etc. Crane, stork, shoebill, ibis, heron, flamingo etc are some of the examples of wader bird.
- ★ The three-day census is being carried out by the Gujarat Government's Forest Department in collaboration with a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) Bird Conservation Society Gujarat (BCSG).
- ★ The sanctuary lies in the intertidal zone. Intertidal zone refers to the area where the sea meets the land during high and low tides. The land area is submerged during the high tides and exposed during the low tide.
- ★ The area is also rich in coral reef fringes and 52 coral species are found here especially at Pirotan, Narala, Ajad and Positara.

31st National Children's Science Congress

- ★ Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav inaugurated the 31st National Children's Science Congress at the Ravindra Bhawan in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh on 3rd January 2025.
- ★ The Chief Minister also inaugurated the automation of the Varahmihira Astronomical Observatory which will allow the common citizens to use the observatory's telescope while sitting at home.
- ★ The 31st National Children's Science Congress will be held from 3-6 January 2025.
- ★ The 30th National Children's Science Congress (NCSC) was held in Ahmedabad, Gujarat from 27–31 January 2023.
- ★ The National Children's Science Congress is organised by the National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC). The NCSTC comes under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.
- ★ The first National Children's Science Congress was organised in 1993.
- ★ The National Children's Science Congress is held every year and is hosted by a State/Union Territory Government.
- ★ Children in the age-group of 10-17 years participate in the Congress. The children could be from formal school or out of school.
- ★ The main aim of the National Children's Science Congress is to provide a platform to children to exhibit their creativity and innovativeness and their ability to solve a societal problem experienced locally using the method of science.
- ★ The main theme of the 31st National Children's Science Congress is "Understanding Ecosystems for Health and Well-being".

HIPA to be Renamed in Honor of Manmohan Singh: CM Sukhu

- ★ Himachal Pradesh Institute of Public Administration (HIPA) will be renamed in honor of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, as announced by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu during the institute's 50th anniversary celebrations.
- ★ The renaming serves as a tribute to Manmohan Singh, who passed away on December 26, 2024, at the age of 92.
- ★ Manmohan Singh served as India's Prime Minister for two terms, from 2004 to 2014.
- ★ Manmohan Singh retired from active politics in April 2024 after completing his term in the Rajya Sabha.
- ★ A coffee-table book, published by HIPA, was launched by CM Sukhu during the 50th anniversary event.
- ★ CM Sukhu also initiated a training programme for special educators as part of the celebrations.

Jammu is to be the 69th Railway Division of the Indian Railway

- ★ The Union Ministry of Railways will set up its 69 railway division at Jammu under the Northern Railway Zone.
- ★ This was intimated to the Northern Zone by the ministry in its official communication issued by the ministry on 1st January 2025 as reported by Akashvani (formerly All India Radio).
- ★ Currently, the Indian Railways has 68 divisions and when the notification is issued by the Indian Railways, Jammu will be the 69th division of the Indian Railways.
- ★ India has the fourth largest rail network in the world after the United States of America, China, and Russia.
- ★ However, the Indian railway is the world's largest railway system under single management and the largest employer with around 1.25 million employees.
- ★ The Jammu Division will be under the Northern Railway Zone. It will be formed by reorganising the existing Firzampur division and it will manage the 742.1 km network.
- ★ The proposed Jammu division will include five sections: Pathankot-Jammu-Udhampur (now martyr Captain Tushar Mahajan), Srinagar-Baramulla, Bhogpur Sirwal-Pathankot, Batala (excluding)-Pathankot, and Pathankot-Joginder Nagar.

Uttarakhand Forest Department Establishes Ethnobotanical Garden in Haldwani

- ★ The Uttarakhand Forest Department has developed an ethnobotanical garden, named "Mahabharata Vatika", in Haldwani, spread over one acre of land.
- ★ The garden showcases 37 plant species mentioned in 18 sections of the Mahabharata, emphasizing its ecological and environmental knowledge.
- ★ The epic contains hymns on the importance of planting trees, creating water bodies, and protecting tigers, reflecting ancient environmental awareness.
- ★ In addition to the "Mahabharata Vatika", the forest department has also set up a "Ramayana Vatika" in Haldwani, focusing on plant species mentioned in the Ramayana.

- ★ Chief Conservator of Forests, Sanjeev Chaturvedi, is overseeing these initiatives to blend environmental education with cultural heritage.

Chhattisgarh Introduces Innovative Plan Linking Forest Ecosystem Services

- ★ Chhattisgarh has introduced a plan that connects the ecosystem services provided by its forests to the Green Gross Domestic Product (Green GDP), marking a first in the state.
- ★ The initiative aims to highlight the direct link between the environmental contributions of forests (clean air, water conservation, biodiversity) and the state's economic progress.
- ★ 44% of Chhattisgarh's land is covered by forests, making its natural resources vital to the livelihoods of millions.
- ★ Forest products like tendu leaves, lac, honey, and medicinal plants significantly contribute to the rural economy.
- ★ Chhattisgarh's forests play a crucial role in mitigating climate change by absorbing carbon.

Uttarakhand Government Signs MoU with ITBP

- ★ Uttarakhand Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) to promote tourism in the border areas of the state.
- ★ This agreement allows the use of ITBP's helipads for tourism-related activities, enhancing accessibility to otherwise hard-to-reach locations.
- ★ The agreement was signed by officials from the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board and ITBP.
- ★ The initiative will expand heli-services to border areas where tourist destinations, such as Adi Kailash, Om Parvat, and Timmarsain Mahadev, are located.
- ★ These religious sites, situated in the Uttarakhand border, have inaccessible roads, making heli-services crucial for attracting tourists.
- ★ The partnership aims to not only boost tourism but also generate substantial revenue from the sale of local products and services to ITBP battalions.
- ★ This initiative is expected to generate annual turnover exceeding ₹200 crore by facilitating local businesses and products.

8th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas Convention 2025

- ★ Bhubaneswar the capital city of Odisha will host the 18th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas Convention from 8-10 January 2025. It is the first time that Bhubaneswar is hosting the biannual Pravasi Bhartiya Divas Convention.
- ★ As part of the Bharatiya Divas Convention, the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will be held in Bhubaneswar on 8 January 2025.
- ★ In India, the 9th of January is observed as the Pravasi Bhartiya Divas since 2003 to mark the contribution of the Pravasi Bhartiya (Overseas Indian) community to the development of India.
- ★ The Union Ministry of External Affairs is organising the 18th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas Convention in association with the Odisha State Government.

- ★ The Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will be organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in partnership with the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the Odisha Government.
- ★ President Murmu will also confer the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award to 27 individuals.
- ★ The theme of the 18th Pravasi Bhartiya Divas Convention is “Diaspora’s Contribution to a Viksit Bharat”.

Gujarat Government Carves Out New District

- ★ The Gujarat Government has decided to split Banaskantha district into two parts, creating a new district named Vav-Tharad, with its headquarters at Tharad.
- ★ With the creation of Vav-Tharad, the total number of districts in Gujarat will increase to 34.
- ★ Banaskantha was the largest district in Gujarat in terms of talukas and the second-largest in terms of area.
- ★ Banaskantha had 14 talukas, and 8 talukas (Vav, Bhabhar, Tharad, Dhanera, Suigam, Lakhni, Diodar, and Kankrej) will now be part of the new Vav-Tharad district.
- ★ The formation of the new district is expected to lead to increased funds and Government grants, resulting in better infrastructure and human development services for the region.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin Offers \$1 Million Reward

- ★ MK Stalin, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, announced a \$1 million cash prize for individuals or organizations that successfully decipher the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) script.
- ★ Despite over 100 years of efforts, the script of the IVC, discovered by Sir John Marshall in 1924, remains a mystery.
- ★ Stalin made this announcement during the Centenary Year celebrations of the IVC discovery in Chennai.
- ★ Tamil Nadu allocated ₹2 crore to establish a research chair in the name of Iravatham Mahadevan, a noted epigraphist, to promote archaeological research.
- ★ An annual award will be given to two scholars to encourage archaeological studies.
- ★ Tamil Nadu has been conducting archaeological excavations at significant sites such as Keeladi (dated to be 2,600 years old) and other sites, uncovering evidence of ancient settlements and water management systems.
- ★ The Sangam Era is now considered to have begun around 600 BCE (pushed back by 300 years), with evidence of rice husks in a burial urn from Sivakalai being dated to 3,200 years ago.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Inaugurates Delhi-Meerut RRTS

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated the Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) connecting Delhi and Meerut, drastically reducing travel time to just 40 minutes.
- ★ The RRTS is seen as a game-changer for Delhi-Meerut connectivity, marking a significant leap in regional travel and infrastructure improvement.
- ★ The newly inaugurated Sahibabad to New Ashok Nagar section is 13 km long, including an underground stretch of 6 km.

- ★ Anand Vihar station in Delhi connects to the Delhi Metro's Blue and Pink Lines, integrating with existing railway and bus terminals.
- ★ The full RRTS corridor spans 55 km, from New Ashok Nagar to Meerut South, with 11 stations along the way.
- ★ The RRTS cuts the travel time between New Ashok Nagar and Meerut South to just 40 minutes, a major improvement from the previous journey time, which was nearly two-thirds longer.

India's First Organic Fisheries Cluster Launched in Sikkim

- ★ The Government of India has launched the country's first organic fisheries cluster in Soreng District of Sikkim.
- ★ The fisheries cluster set up under the Central Government's Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) was inaugurated by Union Minister for Panchayati Raj; and Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh in Guwahati, Assam on 6 January 2025.
- ★ Sikkim is the first fully organic state of India and was certified in 2016. Sikkim now aims to be the first state in India in organic fisheries.
- ★ The first organic fisheries cluster under the PMMSY will be funded by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).
- ★ NABARD will support the fisheries cluster by funding infrastructure, capacity building, and forming fisheries-based Farmer Producer Organizations (FFPOs).
- ★ These clusters will promote organic fisheries and aquaculture free from harmful chemicals, antibiotics and pesticides.

Union Home Minister to Launch BHARATPOL Portal

- ★ Union Home Minister and Minister of Co-operation, Amit Shah, is set to launch the BHARATPOL portal, developed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).
- ★ The event will take place at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.
- ★ The portal promises to enhance real-time information sharing among law enforcement agencies (LEAs) across India and internationally, enabling quicker responses to transnational crimes.
- ★ Aim is to streamline communication and facilitate international police assistance for criminal investigations.
 - Management: CBI will manage the portal as the National Central Bureau (NCB-New Delhi) for INTERPOL in India.
 - Collaboration: It will improve co-ordination between central, state, and union territory law enforcement agencies.
- ★ The portal will centralize and expedite requests related to criminal investigations, such as Red Notices and other INTERPOL notices.

Drone Technology Lab and Centre of Excellence Launched at DCR, Puttur

- ★ The Directorate of Cashew Research (DCR) in Puttur, Dakshina Kannada, has recently launched a Drone Technology Lab and a Centre of Excellence for Profiling and Bioactive Components.

- ★ These initiatives aim to foster innovation in cashew research and promote sustainable agricultural practices.
- ★ **Drone Technology Lab:**
 - The lab is designed to drive innovation in Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) applications, particularly for plantation crops.
 - It is equipped with advanced drone systems and data processing tools, providing a platform for smart farming and research into sustainable agricultural practices.
 - The lab aims to enable research in the application of drone technology to enhance farming techniques.
- ★ **Centre of Excellence for Profiling and Bioactive Components:**
 - The Centre is dedicated to exploring and analyzing the phytochemicals present in cashew apples, nuts, kernels, shells, and leaves.
 - This initiative focuses on identifying bioactive components to promote better utilization of the cashew tree and its products.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Transfers ₹1,415.44 Crore to Women under Maiya Samman Yojana

- ★ Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren transferred ₹1,415.44 crore to 56.61 lakh women under the Maiya Samman Yojana on January 6, 2024.
- ★ The scheme was a key promise made by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led INDIA bloc ahead of the Assembly elections.
- ★ The scheme increased the monthly transfer to women from ₹1,000 to ₹2,500 for women aged between 18 to 50 years.
- ★ The December instalment of ₹2,500 was transferred, and the January instalment would be transferred later.
- ★ ₹30,000 annually is provided to women under the scheme.
- ★ Direct monthly cash transfers of ₹2,500 were aimed at boosting household income, especially in rural areas, improving women's financial autonomy.
- ★ This initiative aimed to bring women into the formal banking system by requiring women's bank accounts for receiving transfers.
- ★ Global economic studies show that women-directed cash transfers lead to improvements in family health, education, and nutrition.
- ★ Women generally invest a higher proportion of their income in family welfare than men.

Green Hydrogen Hub in Andhra Pradesh

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the country's first Green Hydrogen Hub Project under the National Green Hydrogen Mission at Pudimadaka near Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh on 8 January 2025.
- ★ The Prime Minister who was on a visit to Vishakhapatnam also laid the foundation stone of various projects worth over ₹2 lakh crore in the state.

- ★ Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.Chandrababau Naidu was also present on the occasion.
- ★ The first Green Hydrogen Hub at Pudimadaka near Visakhapatnam is being set up by NTPC Green Energy Limited.
- ★ The Hub will be India's largest integrated green hydrogen production facility.
- ★ The Hub will produce 1500 tonnes per day of Green Hydrogen and 7500 tonnes per day of Green Hydrogen derivatives like Green Methanol, Green Urea, and Sustainable Aviation Fuel.
- ★ Total investment is around ₹1, 85,000 crore.
- ★ The hub will also include establishing 20 gigawatts of renewable energy capacities.
- ★ The Green Hydrogen Hub will help in achieving the National National Green Hydrogen Mission target of 5 MMT (Million Metric Tonne) per annum of Green Hydrogen and the addition of 125 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

Union Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya Launches Multilingual Functionality on e-Shram Portal

- ★ Union Minister of Labour and Employment and Youth Affairs and Sports, Mansukh Mandaviya, launched the multilingual functionality of the e-Shram portal in New Delhi.
- ★ This upgrade, part of the Government's vision to make e-Shram a 'One-Stop-Solution', will now support 22 Scheduled Languages, broadening its accessibility across India.
- ★ The portal records an average of 30,000 registrations per day by unorganised workers.
- ★ The platform facilitates access to 12 Central Government schemes designed to benefit unorganised workers.
- ★ The multilingual upgrade is a step toward expanding the outreach of social security schemes to a broader audience.

Indian Biological Data Centre Portals Launched for Indian Genome Data

- ★ India has become self-sufficient in genomic data as India has successfully decoded 10,000 whole genome samples under the GenomeIndia Project.
- ★ To make the genome data accessible to the researchers in India and abroad the Government of India has launched a dedicated Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC) Portal.
- ★ The Portal was launched at the Genome India Data Conclave held in New Delhi on 9 January 2025.
- ★ The Indian Biological Data Centre is the first national repository for life science data in India.
- ★ The Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC) Portal was inaugurated by the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology Dr. Jitendra Singh, in New Delhi.
- ★ The 'Indian Biological Data Centre (IBDC)' maintains all life science data generated from publicly funded research in India.
- ★ The Data Center is under the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).
- ★ The Data Center has been set up at the DBT's Regional Centre of Biotechnology, Faridabad, Haryana in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre.

- ★ The initial aim of the GenomeIndia Project was to sequence 10,000 genomes of healthy Indian individuals from a diverse section of the population across the country.

Uttar Pradesh Becomes First State to Abolish Tendering System

- ★ Uttar Pradesh (UP) has become the first state in India to abolish its longstanding tendering system.
- ★ The state has fully integrated its procurement process with the Centre's Govt e-Marketplace (GeM).
- ★ The integration requires all service providers—from basic stationery suppliers to those providing SUVs for official use—to adhere to Central Government regulations.
- ★ On 26th November 2024, a comprehensive Government order was issued, annulling over 33 previous procurement-related directives.
- ★ This step simplifies and centralizes procurement processes under GeM.
- ★ The Uttar Pradesh Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board has already utilized GeM to procure quality infrastructure materials.
- ★ This procurement supported the development of 18 Atal Residential Schools in the state.

Cabinet Approves 3rd Launchpad for ISRO's New Generation Rockets

- ★ The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the construction of the third launch pad of the Indian Space Research organisation (ISRO) which will be equipped to launch the future human space flight of ISRO and its next generation rockets.
- ★ The approval was given by the Union Cabinet in a meeting held in New Delhi and chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- ★ The launch pad will be constructed at the existing Space port of India-Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.
- ★ The Satish Dhawan Space center already has two functional launch pads from where rockets are launched in space.
- ★ The Government of India has approved a budget of ₹3984.86 crore. The project is expected to be completed within 48 months or 4 years.
- ★ The Government of India has set an ambitious target for the Indian Space programme during the Amrit Kaal.
- ★ It includes establishing an operational Bharatiya Antriksh Station by 2035 and a manned mission to Moon by 2040.

Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 2nd Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on 17 January 2025.
- ★ The first Bharat Mobility Global Expo was held in February 2024 in New Delhi.

- ★ The Bharat Mobility Global Expo is a global mobility Expo that brings together the entire value chain of the mobility sector under one roof.
- ★ The mobility sector refers not only to the automobile sector but also to all the other industries that provide the vehicles and infrastructure for transportation.
- ★ It also includes the new emerging digital technologies sector, electric vehicles, and its associated infrastructure.
- ★ The Bharat Mobility Global Expo celebrates India's growing role as a global hub for mobility and showcases the success of the country across the automotive and mobility value chain, featuring cutting-edge technologies and innovations.
- ★ The theme of the 2nd Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 is "Beyond Boundaries: Co-creating Future Automotive Value Chain".
- ★ The theme emphasizes the need for close collaboration and innovation across the automotive and mobility sectors, emphasizing sustainable and cutting-edge technological advancements.
- ★ The Co-ordinating agency of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo is the Engineering Export Promotion Council of India (EEPC) and supported by the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industries.

Piyush Goyal Inaugurates National Turmeric Board for 'Golden Spices'

- ★ In an effort to boost the development and production of turmeric and turmeric products in India the Government of India has established the National Turmeric Board.
- ★ India is the largest producer and exporter of turmeric in the world which is also known as Indian Saffron or Golden Spice.
- ★ The National Turmeric Board was inaugurated by the Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal through video conferencing in New Delhi.
- ★ The headquarters of the National Turmeric Board is in Nizamabad, Telangana.
- ★ Around 30 % of the turmeric exports from India are contributed by Telangana.
- ★ The National Turmeric Board is under the Department of Commerce, Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

PM Modi Launches Mission Mausam

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Mission Mausam in New Delhi on the occasion of the 150th foundation day of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on 14 January 2025.
- ★ The Mission aims to strengthen India's research and development capability in weather and climate-related science and make the country a weather-ready and climate-smart nation.
- ★ The IMD was set up by the British India Government on 15 January 1875.
- ★ During the function the Prime Minister also released a ₹150 Commemorative coin issued by the Union Ministry of Finance to mark the 150th year of the IMD.
- ★ He also released the 20247 Vision document of the IMD which outlines a roadmap for weather resilience and climate change adaptation for the country by 2047. The Modi Government has set a target to make India a developed country by 2047.

Madhya Pradesh CM Launches Swami Vivekananda Yuva Shakti Mission

- ★ Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav launched the Swami Vivekananda Yuva Shakti Mission on the occasion of the National Youth Day on 12 January 2025 in Bhopal.
- ★ Every year 12 January is observed as National Youth Day since 1985 to mark the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.
- ★ Chief Minister Mohan Yadav also inaugurated the world's largest 3-D rangoli, depicting Swami Vivekananda at the Shaurya Smarak in Bhopal.
- ★ The Swami Vivekananda Yuva Shakti Mission has been launched by the State Government keeping in mind Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guiding principle of GYAN (Focusing on the Poor, Youth, Farmers, and Women) and inspired by the principles of Swami Vivekananda.
- ★ The Chief Minister also launched the Swami Vivekananda Yuva Shakti Mission Portal and theme song.
- ★ The Portal will give information related to the mission to the general public.
- ★ The State Government will try to provide employment to more than 70% of the youth by 2028.
- ★ All youth of the state are to complete education up to class 12th by 2030.
- ★ As part of employment generation efforts, vacant job positions of the past three years will be filled in a single year through the Public Service Commission.

Odisha Announces ₹20,000 Monthly Pension for Those Imprisoned During Emergency

- ★ The Odisha Government has announced a monthly pension of ₹20,000 for people who were imprisoned during the 1975 Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.
- ★ The pension scheme will be effective from January 1, 2025.
- ★ Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had pledged on Independence Day to recognize and support individuals imprisoned during the Emergency.
- ★ Odisha joins other states like Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Assam, which have similar pension schemes for Emergency detainees.
- ★ The scheme includes coverage for all medical expenses of the eligible detainees.
- ★ Individuals arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, Defence of India Rules (DIR), and The Defence and Internal Security of India Rules during the Emergency period from June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977 are eligible.

Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh Launches 'Kreeda App' to Modernize Sports Management

- ★ The Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) launched the 'Kreeda App', a first-of-its-kind mobile application in India, aimed at modernizing and streamlining sports management in the state.
- ★ The app is designed to eliminate malpractices in the issuance of sports quota certificates.

- ★ It provides a unified platform for managing comprehensive sports data, ensuring transparency and efficiency in sports administration.
- ★ The centralized sports calendar within the app enables players to easily apply for tournaments.
- ★ The app simplifies tournament participation and management for both players and administrators.

Kashi Tamil Sangamam to be held from 15-24 February 2025

- ★ The Kashi Tamil Sangamam 2025 Event will be held on February 15-24, 2025.
- ★ The 3rd edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam will focus on Rishi Agastya, emphasizing the ancient connection between Tamil Nadu and Varanasi (Kashi).
- ★ The event is described as a matter of faith, conviction, and commitment to India's heritage.
- ★ Tamil is one of the oldest languages of human civilization, and the Government plays a crucial role in fostering unity and promoting cultural heritage.
- ★ This programme is part of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat initiative, fostering connections between diverse cultural traditions in India.

NHA Urges Registration of ABHA IDs for Enhanced Digital Health System

- ★ The National Health Authority (NHA) has requested the National Medical Commission (NMC) to instruct all medical colleges, government, and private hospitals to actively register patients for the Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Account (ABHA ID).
- ★ This initiative is a key part of India's digital health transformation under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM).
- ★ Digital health data is protected under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, with rules notified on January 3, 2025.
- ★ ABHA ID is a 14-digit unique number enabling patients to access their health records, prescriptions, and consultation details across multiple healthcare providers.
- ★ It links healthcare benefits, including public health programs and insurance schemes, offering seamless access to health records.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Inaugurates Pangsau Pass International Festival

- ★ Arunachal Pradesh's Chief Minister Pema Khandu inaugurated the much-anticipated Pangsau Pass International Festival (PPIF), marking a vibrant return of the event after a four-year break.
- ★ The festival, held at Nampong in the Changlang district, last took place in 2020 before being suspended in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ★ This year's festival, running from January 20 to 22, 2025 showcases the rich cultural tapestry of the region, featuring cultural troupes from 26 diverse tribal communities alongside three groups from Myanmar.
- ★ The event promises a captivating celebration of unity and cultural richness, drawing visitors from across the region.

- ★ As part of the festival's inauguration, the Chief Minister laid the foundation for several key developmental projects.

National Mining Ministers Conference

- ★ The third National Mining Ministers Conference concluded in Konark, Odisha on 21 January 2025 with a focus on critical minerals mining.
- ★ Rajasthan won the award for outstanding contribution in conducting the highest number of auctions in 2023-24.
- ★ Madhya Pradesh was in the second position and Maharashtra at the third position.
- ★ The main aim of the Conference was to bring together the Central Government, State Government, and the industry related to the mining sector to discuss ways to make India self-sufficient in the mineral sector, especially critical minerals, and promote sustainable mining in the country.
- ★ The National Mining Ministers Conference was organised by the Union Ministry of Mines in collaboration with the Odisha State Government.
- ★ A total of 19 Geological Memorandums were signed during the Conference.
- ★ 12 critical mineral memorandums were handed over to the Central Government and the remaining 7 memorandums, covering precious, bulk, and base metal commodities, were handed over to the respective State Governments.

Uttarakhand Cabinet Approves Implementation of Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

- ★ Uttarakhand's Pushkar Singh Dhami Cabinet approved the UCC manual of rules on January 20, 2025.
- ★ Uttarakhand will become the first state to implement the Uniform Civil Code.
- ★ Rules will be announced after local body elections on January 23, 2025.
- ★ The draft was prepared by a 5-member panel led by retired judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.
- ★ The Uniform Civil Code Bill 2024, was passed in the Assembly on February 7, 2024, and notified on March 12, 2024, after the President's assent.
- ★ The UCC portal will feature Aadhaar-based verification, AI-based translation in 22 Indian languages, and integration with 13+ departments, including birth-death registrations and courts.
- ★ The portal offers services like marriage, divorce, and live-in relationship registrations, termination of live-in relationships, intestate and testamentary succession, appeals, complaints, and legal heir declarations.
- ★ The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is a proposed set of laws in India that would apply to all citizens regardless of their religion, caste, or gender.
- ★ It would replace personal laws based on religious scriptures and customs with a common set of rules for matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme Completes 10 Years

- ★ The Government of India's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme completed its 10th anniversary on 22 January 2025.
- ★ The main aim of the scheme was to improve the Sex Ratio at Birth in the country, stop female foeticide, and ensure the survival, protection, and education of the girl child.
- ★ Sex Ratio at Birth refers to the number of girls born for every 1000 male children born.
- ★ To mark the 10th anniversary of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme, the Government of India will organise a series of events across the country focusing on educating, protecting, and empowering the girl child in India.
- ★ The program will continue from 22 January to 8th of March 2025, which is the International Women's Day.
- ★ The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development is the nodal ministry that implements the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme in collaboration with other ministries of the Government of India.
- ★ The Government of India has expanded the objectives of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme and made it a part of the Mission Shakti of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development for the 15th Finance Commission period from 2021-2022 to 2025-2026.

India Prepares for eVTOL Air Taxi Revolution

- ★ The Centre has begun identifying trial sites for air taxis or electric-vertical take off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft.
- ★ eVTOL (Electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing) aircraft represent a cutting-edge solution to urban congestion.
- ★ These electric-powered aircraft can take off and land vertically, like helicopters, and transition to forward flight using tilt rotors.
- ★ eVTOLs are designed to offer sustainable and efficient alternatives to traditional transportation.
- ★ The Centre has initiated visits to states like Gujarat to identify potential trial sites for eVTOL testing.
- ★ A regulatory sandbox is being developed to allow safe testing of new eVTOL technologies in sites with no habitation, equipped with runways and charging facilities.

Kerala Passes Resolution Urging Centre to Scrap UGC Regulations

- ★ Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan presented a resolution in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, urging the Centre to withdraw the 2025 University Grants Commission (UGC) draft regulations and introduce new norms after engaging in discussions with State Governments and academic experts.
- ★ The resolution was passed.
- ★ In support, Higher Education Minister R Bindu mentioned that Kerala is co-ordinating with other states, including Tamil Nadu, which also passed a similar resolution earlier this month, highlighting concerns over increased powers for Governors in appointing Vice Chancellors.

- ★ Vijayan emphasized that universities function based on state laws, and imposing central regulations without consultation could undermine India's federal framework.
- ★ He reminded that under the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act (1977), states hold significant responsibilities in establishing and overseeing universities, including funding most of their operations.
- ★ The draft UGC norms were criticized for excluding State Governments from key appointments, such as Vice Chancellor positions, and for provisions that could commercialize higher education.
- ★ The Kerala assembly has unanimously called for the Central Government to reconsider the draft regulations and to hold consultations with all relevant stakeholders before finalizing new guidelines.

Government Set a Target of 10,000 GI Tag by 2030

- ★ The Government of India has set a target of 10,000 Geographical Indication (GI) tags for the Indian products by 2030.
- ★ According to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) 605 Indian products have been issued GI tags till date.
- ★ The new target for the GI tag was announced by the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal at the GI Samagam held in New Delhi
- ★ The GI Samagam was organised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with the India Today Group.
- ★ The theme of the GI Samagam was "Preserving Heritage, Fostering Innovation", we aim to connect culture, commerce, and innovation".
- ★ A Geographical Indication tag is given to a product having distinct characteristics associated with a definite territory.
- ★ The GI tag provides legal protection for the product and it prevents the unauthorised use of a Registered Geographical Indication by others for commercial use.

India Launches Indian Sustainable Natural Rubber (iSNR) Initiative

- ★ The Indian Sustainable Natural Rubber (iSNR) initiative was launched in Kottayam, Kerala, aligning with globally accepted sustainability principles and the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).
- ★ iSNR ensures zero-deforestation commitments, supporting biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration goals.
- ★ It provides free certification and training to smallholders and encourages sustainable farming practices to improve yields, reduce environmental impact, and enhance livelihoods.
- ★ It implements transparency from farm to factory, ensuring ethical and sustainable sourcing for global buyers.
- ★ The initiative supports India's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Haryana Government Notifies Vehicle Scrappage and Recycling Facility Incentive Policy 2024

- ★ The Haryana Government has notified the Vehicle Scrappage and Recycling Facility Incentive Policy, 2024, which will enable proper disposal and recycling of old vehicles while promoting environmental sustainability. National Green Tribunal (NGT) fixed the passing limit period of 10 years for old diesel vehicles and 15 years for petrol vehicles in the National Capital Region (NCR).
- ★ The Government planned to implement the policy as an industrial scheme, offering capital subsidies or state GST reimbursement to new industrial units.
- ★ Under the policy, the Department of Industries and Commerce would develop a 10-year land leasing module through the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC).
- ★ Financial assistance will also be extended to start-ups, women entrepreneurs, and Scheduled Caste candidates to establish venture capital funds.
- ★ Projects will be eligible for up to 20 crore in financial assistance, covering 10% of project costs (excluding land).
- ★ Additionally, full stamp duty reimbursement will be provided in D-category industrial blocks, while B and C blocks will receive 75%.

Odisha Government Launches Programme to Empower Local Communities

- ★ The Odisha Government has launched a programme aimed at empowering local communities in forest management by providing direct funding for forest protection and management to 100 villages.
- ★ The funds will be deposited into the bank accounts of village councils, or gram sabhas, marking a significant shift in the management of forest resources and placing greater responsibility in the hands of local communities.
- ★ The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs' Project Appraisal Committee (PAC) approved Community Forest Resource (CFR) plans for these 100 villages, which are part of the Forest Rights Act.
- ★ The State Government has plans to implement these initiatives in a total of 400 villages.
- ★ The PAC allocated ₹16 crore for the execution of these plans, with each village receiving ₹15 lakh annually.
- ★ The villagers will also take on responsibility for executing projects under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a shift from the previous system where the Forest Department managed these projects.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Launches 'Deendayal Upadhyay Bhoomiheen Krishi Majdoor Kalyana Yojana'

- ★ Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai launched the 'Deendayal Upadhyay Bhoomiheen Krishi Majdoor Kalyana Yojana' in Raipur.
- ★ Over 62 lakh landless agricultural laborers, including Baigas and Gunias, will receive ₹10,000 annually.
- ★ An amount exceeding ₹562 crore was disbursed to the scheme's beneficiaries.

- ★ CM Sai described January 20 as a “proud and historic day” for the state’s urban bodies, emphasizing the commitment to welfare and development.
- ★ In January 2025, Chhattisgarh became the first Indian state to implement the Green Gross Domestic Product (Green GDP) model.

Kerala Chief Minister Launches KaWaCHaM

- ★ Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurated the Kerala Warnings, Crisis and Hazard Management System (KaWaCHaM) at the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram.
- ★ KaWaCHaM is a state-of-the-art disaster risk warning system aimed at ensuring swift rescue operations and timely alerts in disaster-prone areas.
- ★ The system will provide real-time disaster warnings through sirens and strobe lights, enabling timely evacuation in affected areas.
- ★ It is developed by KSDMA in partnership with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and the World Bank under the National Cyclone Mitigation Plan.
- ★ It provides warnings for extreme weather events such as heavy rain, strong winds, and sea surges.
- ★ District disaster management authorities and emergency operation centres can now issue disaster warnings through sirens and messages.

Haryana Women and Child Development Minister Launches App

- ★ On National Girl Child Day 2025, Haryana Women and Child Development Minister Shruti Choudhry launched the ‘Samman Sanjeevani’ app under the ‘Mahila Evam Kishori Samman Yojana’ in Chandigarh.
- ★ The app aims to ensure timely delivery of benefits under the scheme for BPL women and girls aged 10-45 years by tracking facilities like the distribution of sanitary napkins through Anganwadi centres and schools.
- ★ It will also collect beneficiary data and provide monthly updates.
- ★ The Minister highlighted that the Women and Child Development Department is celebrating the 10th anniversary of the ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’ scheme, with various programmes planned to promote women’s empowerment and raise awareness about the importance of daughters.
- ★ This initiative reinforces Haryana’s commitment to enhancing the health, education, and welfare of women and girls.

Telangana CM Launches 4 Welfare Schemes on Republic Day

- ★ The Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy launched the four welfare schemes of his Government – Rythu Bharosa, Indiramma Atmiya Bharosa, Indiramma Indlu, and new ration cards on the occasion of the Republic Day on 26 January 2025.
- ★ The schemes were promised by the ruling Congress Party during the 2023 Telangana legislative assembly election. The Congress came back to power with a landslide victory.

- Rythu Bharosa: eligible farmers will be provided financial assistance of ₹12,000 per acre of arable land. The amount will be credited to the farmer's bank account.
- Indiramma Aathmeeya Bharosa: financial support of ₹12,000 annually will be provided to landless agricultural labour families.
- Indiramma Indlu: a housing scheme for, homeless Dalits, Tribals, and backward classes. They will receive financial assistance of ₹5 lakh to construct homes. The Government has set a target to construct 4,50,000 houses in 2024-2025 with a budget outlay of ₹22,500 crore.

Nagaland Launches Chief Minister Mobile Operation Theatre

- ★ Nagaland Governor La Ganesan launched the Chief Minister Mobile Operation Theatre on the occasion of the 76th Republic Day celebration in the state capital, Kohima on 26 January 2026.
- ★ The Chief Minister Mobile Operation Theatre initiative of the State Government aims to provide advanced surgical and healthcare facilities to the remote and rural areas of the state.
- ★ The Mobile Operation Theatre which will be on a modified vehicle will be managed by doctors from Kohima hospitals and will include private hospital doctors.
- ★ The Mobile Operation Theatre is equipped with an advanced mobile surgical unit and portable diagnostic tools such as ultrasound, X-ray, endoscopy, and blood testing equipment, along with instruments for minimally invasive surgeries.
- ★ It is equipped with state-of-the-art keyhole surgery capabilities.

Telangana Government Begins Disbursal of Rythu Bharosa Benefits

- ★ The Rythu Bharosa scheme is one of the four welfare programmes launched on Republic Day, January 26, alongside the Indiramma Housing Scheme, Indiramma Aathmeeya Bharosa Scheme, and the issuance of new ration cards.
- ★ On the first day, 6,15,677 people across 563 villages benefited from these schemes.
- ★ Under the Rythu Bharosa scheme, the Government disbursed ₹569 crore to 4,41,911 farmers in 577 villages, covering 9,48,333 acres of cultivable land. Farmers receive ₹6,000 per acre per season as crop investment support, and the scheme will continue disbursements until March 31.
- ★ Through the Indiramma Aathmeeya Bharosa Scheme, the Government credited ₹10.91 crore into the accounts of 18,180 landless agriculture labourers, providing ₹6,000 per season as financial assistance.
- ★ The Government issued 15,141 new ration cards in 531 villages, benefiting 51,912 families, and added 1.03 lakh members to existing ration cards. These beneficiaries will start receiving rations from February.
- ★ Under the Indiramma Housing Scheme, 72 houses were sanctioned.
- ★ Due to the large number of applications for ration cards and Indiramma houses, the Government has extended the deadline until March, and officials are verifying applications to finalise the list of beneficiaries.

Government Approves ₹16,300 Crore for National Critical Mineral Mission

- ★ The Government of India has approved the National Critical Mineral Mission, which aims to make the country self-reliant in critical minerals by encouraging the exploration of minerals within India and encouraging Indian companies to acquire mineral blocks outside the country.
- ★ The National Critical Mineral Mission was approved by the Union Cabinet in a meeting held in New Delhi on 29 January 2025 and was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- ★ The National Critical Mineral Mission was announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her 2024-25 budget speech delivered on 23rd July 2024.
- ★ The proposed total outlay for the National Critical Mineral Mission is ₹34,300 crore.
- ★ The Central Government will provide ₹16,300 crore for the mission through the union budget while the public sector and private companies are expected to invest ₹18,000 crore.
- ★ The duration of the Mission is seven years from 2024-25 to 2030-31.
- ★ The Union Ministry of Mines is the apex nodal body for implementing the National Critical Mineral Mission in the country.

Pramod Sawant Inaugurates the Sci-FI Science Film Festival of India

- ★ Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant inaugurated the 10th Sci-FI Science Film Festival of India in Panaji on 29 January 2025.
- ★ The 4-day 10th Sci-FI Science Film Festival of India will be held in Panaji from 29 January to 1 February 2025.
- ★ The annual Sci-FI Science Film Festival of India is organised by the Goa Government every year to foster curiosity, scientific temperament, and enthusiasm amongst the students.
- ★ The festival will inspire the youth of the state to pursue a career in science and play a crucial role in making India a developed country by 2047.
- ★ The theme of the 10th Sci-FI Science Film Festival of India is the Green Revolution. It is a tribute to the father of the Indian Green Revolution Dr M.S. Swaminathan.
- ★ The Sci-FI Science Film Festival of India is organised by the Vidnyan Parishad Goa with the support of the Goa Science Council and the Goa Science and Technology Department.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Russia Introduces New Tourist Tax from January 1, 2025

- ★ The new tourist tax in Russia came into effect on January 1, 2025, replacing the previous resort fee.
- ★ The tax aims to bolster regional tourism infrastructure as part of amendments to the Russian Tax Code introduced in July 2024, under the new chapter titled "Tourist Tax".
- ★ The tax is a local levy at the discretion of regional authorities. Many regions, particularly those with strong tourism sectors, have adopted it.

- ★ While hotels and lodging providers are officially responsible for paying the tax, the cost is incorporated into accommodation prices and passed on to tourists.
- ★ The tax is part of a phased plan to strengthen regional tourism infrastructure over time.

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's Wishlist Includes BrahMos Missiles

- ★ The purchase of BrahMos missiles is a key item on the agenda for Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto during his proposed visit to India for the Republic Day celebrations later this month.
- ★ Indonesia could become the third country from South-East Asia to purchase the BrahMos missile system, following the Philippines and Vietnam.
- ★ During his visit to India as Defence Minister in 2020, BrahMos was a significant topic of discussion in his meeting with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.
- ★ Indonesia will send nearly 400 military personnel to participate in the Republic Day parade on January 26, marking the highest number of personnel from any guest country in recent years.
- ★ This will be the fourth time an Indonesian President will be the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations.
- ★ Previous instances include Joko Widodo's presence in 2018, where all ASEAN leaders attended to celebrate 25 years of India-ASEAN dialogue partnership.
- ★ Prabowo Subianto, a strong proponent of India-Indonesia ties, is also interested in adopting India's digital initiatives, the mid-day meal scheme for schools, and providing milk to students.

World Bank Approves \$20 Billion Development Funding Package for Pakistan

- ★ The World Bank is set to approve a \$20 billion indicative lending package for Pakistan under a 10-year initiative called the Pakistan Country Partnership Framework 2025-35.
- ★ This funding package aims to safeguard funded projects from political transitions and focus on six key areas to improve social indicators in Pakistan.
- ★ The package will focus on the following areas: Reducing child stunting, Combating learning poverty, Enhancing climate resilience, Decarbonising the environment, Expanding fiscal space and Boosting private investment to improve productivity.
- ★ The World Bank board is scheduled to approve the framework on January 14, 2025.
- ★ The total indicative lending for the period 2025-2035 will be \$20 billion:
 - \$14 billion will be lent through the International Development Association (IDA), which is concessional.
 - \$6 billion will be lent through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which is relatively more expensive.

US To Lift Sanctions on Indian Entities for Civil Nuclear Co-operation

- ★ The United States National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has announced that the United States will lift the sanctions imposed on certain Indian entities to promote close co-operation in civilian nuclear programmes.

- ★ The sanctions were imposed by the United States after India conducted a series of nuclear test in Pokhran, Rajasthan in 1998.
- ★ The United States imposed sanctions on over 200 Indian entities in response to India's nuclear test in Pokhran in 1998.
- ★ Jake Sullivan was on a two-day visit to India on 5th and 6th January 2025 to attend the 3rd meeting of the India-US initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) with the Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.
- ★ During his visit, Jake Sullivan said that co-operation in the next generation of semiconductor technologies, cutting-edge research and space exploration will be the area of focus of the co-operation between the two countries.

UNESCO Recognizes Sevdalinka as Intangible World Cultural Heritage

- ★ In December, 2024 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added Sevdalinka (also known as Sevdah) to its list of intangible world cultural heritage.
- ★ Sevdalinka is a traditional folk music genre that dates back to the 16th century Ottoman Empire.
- ★ The music is often referred to as the “Balkan Blues” due to its focus on sad love songs.
- ★ The inclusion of Sevdalinka in UNESCO's heritage list is seen as a victory for musicians and performers, helping to preserve the art form.
- ★ Sevdalinka is often performed a capella or with traditional instruments, such as the lute, and has been passed down generationally through performances at family gatherings.

India and Spain sign Two MoUs During Dr. Jaishankar's Visit to Spain

- ★ India and Spain have signed two memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen and deepen the bilateral relations between the two countries.
- ★ The agreement was signed during External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar's visit to Spain. Dr Jaishankar was on a two-day official visit to Spain on 13 and 14 January 2025 where he met senior leaders of the Spanish Government.
- ★ The ties between India and Spain have gained strength in recent times with the successful visit of the President of the Government of Spain (Prime Minister) Pedro Sanchez to India in October 2024.
- ★ During the visit of Pedro Sanchez, both countries decided to celebrate 2026 as the “Year of Culture, Tourism, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)”.
- ★ Two MoUs were signed between the two countries: MoU on co-operation in sports and Co-operation on sustainable urban development.

China Completes World's Longest Expressway Tunnel in Xinjiang Region

- ★ China has completed the construction of the world's longest expressway tunnel, known as the Tianshan Shengli Tunnel, located in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.
- ★ The Tianshan Shengli Tunnel is 22.13 kilometers long, situated in the Tianshan Mountains, at an elevation of 3,000 feet above sea level.

- ★ The tunnel will significantly reduce travel time by shortening a three-hour journey to just 20 minutes, offering a major convenience for commuters.
- ★ The tunnel will connect Northern and Southern Xinjiang, facilitating access to Eurasian countries involved in the Silk Road Economic Belt.
- ★ The tunnel is part of the 319.72-kilometer Urumqi-Yuli Expressway, which will reduce driving time between Urumqi and Yuli County from seven hours to just over three hours.
- ★ The expressway is expected to open in 2025.

United States Delists 3 Indian Entities from Trade Blacklist

- ★ The United States Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) removed three Indian organizations from its Entity List.
- ★ Indian Entities Removed:
 - Indian Rare Earths
 - Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Center (IGCAR)
 - Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Mumbai, India
- ★ The removal aims to enhance U.S.-India energy co-operation, particularly in advanced energy sectors, defense, and technology.
- ★ It is seen as a commitment by the U.S. to strengthen its partnership with India.
- ★ The development is in line with broader geopolitical strategies to counter regional challenges and enhance the Indo-Pacific framework.
- ★ The removal signals reduced barriers to co-operation in nuclear technology and scientific advancements.

Brazil Announces Indonesia's Admission to BRICS Bloc of Developing Nations

- ★ Indonesia has been admitted as a full member of the BRICS bloc of developing economies, the group's presiding country Brazil announced.
- ★ Indonesia became the 10th full member of the international BRICS group.
- ★ Indonesia's candidacy was endorsed by BRICS leaders in August 2023, according to the Foreign Ministry of Brazil, which holds the group's presidency for 2024.
- ★ BRICS was formed by Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009, and added South Africa in 2010.
- ★ In 2024, the alliance expanded to embrace Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia has been invited to join, but has not yet done so.
- ★ Turkey, Azerbaijan and Malaysia have formally applied to become members, and a few others have expressed interest.
- ★ The most recent BRICS summit, the 16th such gathering, took place in Kazan, Russia, in October 2024 and was hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin.
- ★ This year's BRICS summit will take place in Rio de Janeiro in July, 2025.

Bank of Japan Poised to Increase Interest Rates

- ★ Kazuo Ueda, Governor of the Bank of Japan (BOJ), will evaluate the need to raise interest rates during the upcoming meeting.
- ★ While most central banks, like the Federal Reserve, are focusing on rate cuts, the BOJ is considering raising rates as part of its efforts to move toward conventional policy settings after decades of low inflation and weak economic growth.
- ★ Japan is close to achieving stable inflation and has seen solid wage growth, creating favorable conditions for the BOJ to increase borrowing costs toward levels seen in other major economies.
- ★ Around 90% of economists surveyed by Bloomberg believe that current economic conditions and prices warrant a rate hike from the current 0.25%.
- ★ Traders have priced in a January rate hike in the overnight swaps market, showing heightened market expectations for the BOJ to act.

US to Withdraw from WHO and Paris Climate Accord

- ★ American President Donald Trump signed several Executive Orders to implement his election promise of America first.
- ★ The Executive Order signed on 20 January 2025 includes several controversial issues and reverses the previous Joe Biden administration decisions.
- ★ The order includes the American withdrawal from the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015, ending automatic citizenship rights for foreign parent's children born in the USA.
- ★ The order also includes a declaration of state of emergency along the Mexican border to curb illegal migrants seeking asylum in the USA by crossing the Mexican border to the USA.
- ★ The withdrawal of the US from the international agreements will take place after 12 months after the signing of the President's Executive Orders.
- ★ Reason for withdrawal:
 - The mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and other international health crises by the WHO.
 - In an apparent reference to China, the Trump administration accused the WHO of failing to act independently from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states.

UNESCO and MeitY Collaborate on AI Readiness Assessment

- ★ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), in partnership with Ikigai Law, organized a two-day AI Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM) consultation.
- ★ Held on January 16-17, 2025, at IIIT Bangalore and the NASSCOM AI office, the consultation aimed to align India's AI ecosystem with global ethical standards, focusing on responsible and ethical AI adoption.
- ★ The consultation aimed to create an India-specific AI policy by identifying growth opportunities and strengths within the AI landscape.
- ★ The AI RAM tool was used to assess India's AI landscape, including infrastructure, legislation, key stakeholders, and governance frameworks.

- ★ It emphasized ethical principles like transparency, inclusiveness, and fairness as outlined in UNESCO's Global Recommendation on the Ethics of AI.
- ★ The consultation aligns with India's INDIAai Mission, backed by over ₹10,000 crore in funding, focused on creating Safe and Trusted AI.
- ★ The mission promotes indigenous AI frameworks, robust governance, and self-assessment guidelines to ensure safety, accountability, and ethical practices in AI.

India Becomes Observer in the Eurodrone Programme

- ★ India has officially joined the Eurodrone programme as an observer state, marking its entry into the OCCAR-managed Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS).
- ★ The Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation (OCCAR), based in Bonn, Germany, approved India's request made in August 2024.
- ★ The Letter of Approval (LoA) was delivered to India's ambassador to Germany, Ajit Gupte, by OCCAR-EA Director Joachim Sucker.
- ★ Airbus, in collaboration with Leonardo (Italy), Dassault Aviation (France), and Airbus Defence and Space (Spain), is developing the Eurodrone.
- ★ It is designed for diverse missions, including Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR), maritime surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, and airborne early warning.
- ★ India's participation follows Japan, which became the first observer state in November 2023. This move reflects India's intent to explore defence collaboration opportunities with Europe.
- ★ Observer status enables India to engage in discussions and collaborations on common interests related to advanced defence technology and innovation.

5 MoU Signed Between India and Indonesia

- ★ President Prabowo Subianto of Indonesia successfully concluded his four-day official visit to India on 26 January 2025.
- ★ His visit to India from 23-26 January 2025 was his first official visit after becoming the President of Indonesia in 2024.
- ★ He was the Chief Guest at the 76th Republic Day ceremony, and during his visit to India, he held high-level talks with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi
- ★ Five MoUs were exchanged between the two sides that aims to strengthen the bilateral ties between the two countries. These MoUs are as follows:
 - Co-operation in Health.
 - Renewal of the agreement between the Indian Coast Guard and the Indonesian Coast Guard on Maritime Safety and Security.
 - Co-operation in Traditional Medicine Quality Assurance between Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homeopathy and Indonesian Food and Drug Authority.
 - Co-operation in the Fields of Digital Development.
 - Cultural Exchange Program between the two countries for the 2025-28 period.

India to Participate at FITUR 2025

- ★ The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, participated in FITUR 2025, one of the leading travel fairs held in Madrid, Spain, from January 22-26, 2025.
- ★ This global exhibition serves as a crucial platform for positioning India as a prime travel destination for Spain and Latin America, marking a key step in boosting inbound tourism from these regions.
- ★ Over 23 co-exhibitors participated, representing State Governments of Karnataka, Sikkim, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand, among others.
- ★ The pavilion showcased India's diverse tourism products and experiences, including cultural heritage, wildlife sanctuaries, spiritual destinations, and traditional dance forms.
- ★ The pavilion emphasized Prayagraj as a spiritual and cultural hub, spotlighting the significance of the Maha Kumbh.
- ★ India's rich cultural and natural heritage was prominently displayed, appealing to travellers seeking authentic and unique experiences.
- ★ The year 2026 will celebrate the 70th year of diplomatic relations between India and Spain, designated as the Dual Year of Culture, Tourism, and Artificial Intelligence.
- ★ The Ministry of Tourism launched the 'Chalo India Initiative' to encourage the Indian diaspora to promote tourism.

UAE President Sheikh Mohamed declares 2025 as 'Year of Community'

- ★ United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan announced 2025 as the Year of Community, aiming to promote unity and inclusion across the society.
- ★ The initiative, under the slogan "Hand in Hand", reflects the leadership's vision to foster a cohesive and empowered community.
- ★ The UAE is home to over four million Indians, who play a vital role in the nation's diverse population, and this initiative reinforces the leadership's commitment to creating a harmonious.
- ★ Sheikh Mohamed called on all residents to contribute to community-building efforts, ensuring the UAE remains a model of progress and prosperity.
- ★ Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, supported the initiative, emphasizing that the nation's strength lies in unity and strong families.
- ★ Throughout the year, various events and programs will encourage participation in volunteering, cultural diversity, and community service.

India and Oman to Amend Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement

- ★ India and Oman have signed a protocol to amend the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) and have also agreed to continue negotiations on the proposed India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
- ★ This was agreed between the two countries during the visit of the Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal to Oman.

- ★ Piyush Goyal was in Oman to attend the 11th Session of the India-Oman Joint Commission Meeting held in the Omani capital city of Muscat.
- ★ The meeting was co-chaired by Piyush Goyal and Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef.
- ★ During the meeting, both leaders discussed steps that need to be taken to promote bilateral co-operation in trade, investment, technology, food security, renewable energy, and other key areas.
- ★ DTAA is signed between two nations to avoid double taxation and prevent tax evasion on income.
- ★ Under the DTAA if a citizen/company of one country is working/investing in another country then the tax on his income has to be paid in one country only as per the provision of the DTAA.
- ★ If an Indian working in Oman pays tax on his income in Oman then he will not pay tax on the same income in India. Similar benefits are extended to the Omani working in India or Omani companies investing in India.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

ISRO Successfully Launches Critical Space Docking Mission

- ★ Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched its critical space docking mission (SpaDex Mission).
- ★ The PSLVC-60 rockets carrying two satellites on board were launched from ISRO's Satish Dhawan Space Center SHAR, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh on 30 December 2024.
- ★ If successful, it will make India the fourth country in the world after Russia, the United States of America, and China- to master the art of rendezvous, space docking, and undocking.
- ★ The whole mission is crucial for the country's manned mission to the moon and supporting a space station.
- ★ Rendezvous in space is the process of bringing two spacecraft together. The docking refers to the meeting of both the spacecraft and physical joining,
- ★ The essential elements of a rendezvous are the matching of orbital trajectories and the movement of one spacecraft within proximity of the other, typically within 100 meters (330 feet).
- ★ SpaDex mission is a technology demonstrator project of ISRO. It carries two small spacecraft SDX01 (the Chaser) and SDX02 (theTarget), each weighing 220 kg.
- ★ The mastery of space docking is crucial for the building and operation of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station and a manned mission to the moon.

Tata Elxsi Partners with Qualcomm Technologies

- ★ Tata Elxsi has announced collaboration with Qualcomm Technologies, Inc. to develop virtual models of Snapdragon Digital Chassis solutions for cloud-native application development aimed at accelerating the adoption of Software-Defined Vehicles (SDV) in next-gen mobility.
- ★ The collaboration will be demonstrated at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) 2025, where Tata Elxsi will showcase the development of a virtual electronic control unit (ECU) platform.

- ★ The platform will utilize Snapdragon virtual system-on-chips (VSoCs) and target automakers and Tier-1 suppliers in the passenger, commercial, and off-highway vehicle segments.
- ★ The initiative will use Snapdragon Digital Chassis VSoCs to revolutionize the SDV development process, particularly in R & D teams.
- ★ It will reduce dependency on hardware availability, speeding up software development and validation, thus shortening product development lifecycles.
- ★ At CES 2025, Tata Elxsi will integrate its AVENIR SDV suite with Snapdragon Ride Flex SoC to demonstrate real-world use cases.
- ★ This will include mixed-critical workloads for infotainment and advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS).

IIT Madras collaborates with Ministry of Agriculture

- ★ The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras has announced collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare on Project VISTAAR (Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources).
- ★ The initiative aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the agricultural extension system through digitalisation.
- ★ This will help farmers and other stakeholders access the capabilities and offerings of these start-ups more easily.
- ★ The startup information platform developed by the Centre for Research on Startups and Risk Financing at IIT Madras, along with its incubated startup YNOS Venture Engine, contains details on over 12,000 start-ups in the agriculture and farming sectors.
- ★ This collaboration will make this rich information easily accessible to farmers and significantly enhance the effectiveness of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers.

CSIR Develops Paracetamol Drugs Indigenously

- ★ The Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science and Technology Dr Jitendra Singh announced that the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has developed the technology to produce Paracetamol indigenously.
- ★ This was announced by Dr Jitendra Singh at the 40th Foundation Day of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) in New Delhi on 5 January 2025.
- ★ The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research is a part of the Union Ministry of Science and Technology.
- ★ At present, India imports key ingredients of the drug from many parts of the world.
- ★ The technology has been transferred to the Karnataka-based Satya Deeptha Pharmaceuticals Ltd to manufacture the affordable paracetamol domestically.
- ★ He also mentioned the development and launch of the first indigenously developed antibiotic “Nafithromycin” to treat drug-resistant bacterial infections.
- ★ The antibiotic has been developed with the support of “Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council” (BIRAC), under the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology.

Assam Launches Northeast's Largest Eri Silk Spinning Mill in Baksa District

- ★ The largest Eri silk spinning mill in the Northeast is located in Baksa district, Assam.
- ★ The mill was set up by the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHHDC).
- ★ Built at a cost of ₹14.92 crore, the mill spans 12,916 square feet at the Integrated Textile Park in Kharuajan, Mushalpur.
- ★ The mill was inaugurated by Pramod Boro, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).
- ★ The project is expected to provide direct employment to 375 individuals.
- ★ It is estimated to offer indirect livelihood support to approximately 50,000 households.
- ★ 22 people are currently employed at the mill, with 54% of them belonging to the Boro community.
- ★ The mill is expected to strengthen the rural economy by providing sustainable livelihoods, especially for women involved in Eri silk cultivation.
- ★ It will help reduce migration of youth in search of employment opportunities by fostering industrial growth.

Salam Kisan Partners with IIT Ropar

- ★ Salam Kisan, a leading agritech platform, has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Ropar to foster agritech innovation through advanced technologies.
- ★ The partnership was officially announced at the World Agri-Tech Innovation Summit 2024 in Dubai.
- ★ The partnership aims to utilize Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and cyber-physical systems to empower farmers and promote sustainable agricultural practices.
- ★ A focus will be on skilling and upskilling farmers to improve their digital literacy and capabilities.
- ★ The collaboration will also promote methods that enhance the sustainability of agricultural practices.
- ★ The MoU includes mentoring for early-stage agritech start-ups, providing resources and guidance to scale their solutions.

Satya Nadella Announces Cloud and AI-Driven Strategic Partnerships with Indian Government

- ★ Satya Nadella, Chairman and CEO of Microsoft, announced cloud and AI-led strategic partnerships with the Indian Government and industry leaders across key sectors of the Indian economy.
- ★ Microsoft is partnering with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) under the IndiaAI Mission.
- ★ The goal of the partnership is to make India a global leader in artificial intelligence (AI).

- ★ The collaboration with MeitY aims to accelerate AI development and adoption in India, while promoting an inclusive, innovative, and ethical AI ecosystem.
- ★ Microsoft announced a \$3 billion investment over two years to boost cloud and AI infrastructure in India.
- ★ This investment will focus on AI adoption, skilling, and innovation.
- ★ Microsoft will contribute to the IndiaAI Mission Datasets platform, focusing on data collection and synthetic data generation. They will engage with partners such as AI4Bharat.
- ★ Microsoft plans to skill 5 lakh students and teachers in AI by 2026 through collaborations with educational institutions and Government bodies.
- ★ Microsoft will establish AI Productivity Labs in 20 National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs)/NIELIT centres across 10 states to train 20,000 educators in foundational AI courses.

Pixxel Launches India's 1st Private Satellite Constellation with SpaceX

- ★ Google-backed Indian space start-up company Pixxel has become the first Indian private company to launch its commercial satellite constellation named Firefly on board a Space X rocket on 14 January 2025.
- ★ The SpaceX rocket also carried the world's first commercial satellite for surveillance of space objects orbiting the earth, made by an Indian space company, Digantara.
- ★ Both the Pixxel and Digantara satellites were launched by Elon Musk's company SpaceX.
- ★ Bengaluru-based space startup company Digantara launched the world's first commercial satellite for surveillance of space objects orbiting the Earth.
- ★ The satellite named Space Camera for Object Tracking (SCOT) aims to enhance space safety and optimize space traffic management.
- ★ SCOT satellite will be placed in the sun-synchronous orbit which will track objects in Low Earth Orbit (LEO).
- ★ The floating debris in space like man-made objects not in use (used satellites, rocket parts, etc) poses a significant challenge to safe space navigation.
- ★ The SCOT satellite will continuously monitor objects in the LEO orbit and issue alerts so that space navigation becomes safe.
- ★ The SCOT satellites are the world's first commercial Space Situational Awareness satellite.

Solar Group Tests India's First Indigenous Micro-Missile Drone System 'Bhargavastra'

- ★ India has successfully tested its 1st indigenously developed micro-missile system, Bhargavastra, designed to counter the growing threat of swarm drones.
- ★ The tests were conducted at the Gopalpur Seaward Firing Ranges, the system successfully hit designated virtual targets over 5 kilometres away, offering a cost-effective and innovative solution to neutralize large-scale drone attacks.

- ★ Developed by Economic Explosives Ltd (EEL), a subsidiary of the Solar Group, Bhargavastra is equipped with advanced capabilities, including detecting small incoming drones at a range of over 6 kilometres.
- ★ It neutralizes threats using guided micro-munitions, ensuring precision and effectiveness.
- ★ The system is mountable on mobile platforms for rapid deployment and operates seamlessly across diverse terrains, including high-altitude areas, meeting the unique operational needs of India's armed forces.
- ★ An additional soft-kill layer is being integrated to make the system a comprehensive solution for all UAV threats.
- ★ The system can also integrate with the armed forces' existing network for network-centric warfare.
- ★ Equipped with a Command-and-Control Centre using advanced C4I (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence)

Telangana Signs Memorandum of Understanding with Skyroot

- ★ Skyroot Aerospace has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Telangana Government to set up an integrated private rocket manufacturing, integration, and testing facility.
- ★ The new project will involve an investment of around ₹500 crore, making it one of the largest private-sector rocket manufacturing facilities in India.
- ★ The MoU was signed at the World Economic Forum summit in Davos, overseen by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and IT and Industries Minister D. Sridhar Babu.
- ★ The investment aligns with Telangana's strategic focus on boosting its space and aerospace sectors, with Hyderabad being positioned as a key hub for private sector space work.
- ★ Skyroot Aerospace is a Hyderabad-based space technology firm, and its partnership with the Telangana Government is seen as a significant boost for the state's vision of "TelanganaRising" and "HyderabadRising".

First Technology Dialogue 2025 Held in IISc Bengaluru

- ★ The first edition of the Technology Dialogue was inaugurated at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, Karnataka.
- ★ The Technology Dialogue has been organised by the External Affairs Ministry in partnership with the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India and the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.
- ★ The theme of the Technology Dialogue is "Exploring New Frontiers in Technology Diplomacy". The theme highlights the focus of the Technology Dialogue on technology policy and partnerships.
- ★ The Technology Dialogue will bring together the senior policymakers, industry leaders, scientists and scholars to discuss and deliberate on key issues relating to the technology domain including India's international technology engagements.
- ★ The Technology Dialogue aims to capitalise on this trend and seeks to promote India's interest in the Science and Technology sector.

- ★ It will encourage discussion on critical emerging technologies focused on – Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Advancements, Space, Semiconductors and Bioeconomy.
- ★ The Dialogue seeks to enhance the world's collaboration and co-operation with India in these sectors.

ISRO Successfully Launches GSLV F15

- ★ The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) achieved a significant milestone by successfully launching its 100rd mission from its Spaceport – Satish Dhawan Space Centre Sriharikota (SHAR), Andhra Pradesh on 29 January 2025. The GSLV-F-15 rocket carrying the NVS-02 satellite was launched from the second launch pad of the SHAR.
- ★ In 1971 the first rocket – a sounding rocket RH-125 was launched from Sriharikota.
- ★ Recently the Government of India has approved the construction of a 3rd launchpad in the SHAR to enable ISRO to launch heavier rockets to meet the ambitious target of the Indian Space programme during the Amrit Kaal.
- ★ The launch of the GSLV-F-15 from Sriharikota was the 17th launch of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) of ISRO. It was the 8th operational launch of GSLV with an indigenously developed cryogenic stage.
- ★ The GSLV is a 51.7m long, three-stage rocket.
- ★ The NVS-02 satellite launched by the GSLV-F-15 rocket was the second satellite in the second-generation series of satellites for the Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) system.
- ★ Five second-generation satellites will be launched by ISRO. The first satellite of the second-generation NaviC, NVS-01, was launched in May 2023 with an Indigenous atomic clock.
- ★ The second-generation satellite will augment the first-generation NaviC satellites and help in providing better services.

BANKING, FINANCE & ECONOMICS

Reserve Bank Innovation Hub Teams Up with Digital Lender Vivifi Finance

- ★ The Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH) has partnered with Vivifi Finance to launch a pilot project aimed at providing unsecured loans to gig workers.
- ★ The pilot aims to develop a digital platform for providing loans to cab-hailing app drivers, such as those working with Ola and Uber, food delivery drivers employed by Swiggy and Zomato, and other gig workers.
- ★ The RBI innovation hub is running a pilot with Vivifi Finance and three other gig platforms, where alternate data is being used to underwrite these gig workers.
- ★ The Reserve Bank Innovation Hub is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), established to promote and foster an environment that accelerates innovation across the financial sector.

- ★ Unified Lending Interface (ULI) is a digital public infrastructure designed to provide lenders with access to critical financial, non-financial, and alternative data for informed credit decisions.
- ★ Currently, 36 lenders, including banks and NBFCs, are onboarded, leveraging over 50 data services such as authentication, land records from six states, satellite data, property searches, dairy insights, and document verification.
- ★ The RBIH initially launched the Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit to develop an end-to-end digital solution for agriculture loans.
- ★ This platform was subsequently renamed the Unified Lending Interface and entered its pilot phase on August 17, 2023.

ICICI Prudential Life and RGA Unveil Insurance Product

- ★ ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has partnered with Reinsurance Group of America (RGA) to launch a unique health insurance product.
- ★ The product specifically caters to women's health, covering critical illnesses and surgeries.
- ★ The product provides an instant payout of up to 100% of the health cover amount upon the diagnosis of critical illnesses.
- ★ Key covered conditions include breast cancer, cervical cancer, uterine cancer, and heart ailments.
- ★ ICICI Pru Wish offers a premium guarantee for 30 years, helping customers plan their premium payments better.
- ★ It also allows customers to take a premium sabbatical for up to 12 months during the premium payment term.
- ★ The product is designed to address health risks specific to women, providing financial support in case of critical illnesses.

IDBI Bank to Raise ₹10,000 Crore through Long-Term Bonds

- ★ IDBI Bank has approved the issuance of Long-Term Bonds to finance Infrastructure and Affordable Housing projects, raising up to ₹10,000 crore.
- ★ The bond issuance will occur in tranches, with ₹5,000 crore expected to be raised by March 31, 2025, and the balance during FY 2025-26.
- ★ The funds raised through these bonds will be used for financing infrastructure and affordable housing projects.
- ★ These long-term infrastructure bonds are eligible for certain regulatory exemptions, including relief from statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) and cash reserve ratio (CRR) requirements.
- ★ Banks and financial institutions use infrastructure bonds to raise funds for long-term infrastructure projects, with a minimum maturity of seven years.
- ★ The move reflects the growing trend among banks to raise funds through infrastructure bonds, particularly due to slower deposit growth in the banking sector.

UPI Transactions Hit Record High of 16.73 Billion in December

- ★ According to the latest data by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), In December 2024, Unified Payment Interface (UPI) transactions reached an all-time high of 16.73 billion, surpassing the previous record of 16.58 billion in October 2024.
- ★ UPI transactions increased month-on-month, rising from 15.48 billion in November to 16.73 billion in December 2024.
- ★ The total value of UPI transactions in December 2024 was ₹23.25 trillion, showing a significant recovery from ₹21.55 trillion in November.
- ★ The number of daily UPI transactions increased from 516 million in November to 540 million in December 2024.
- ★ UPI transactions are projected to exceed 100 crore transactions per day by FY27.

MicroFinance Institutions Network Grants Three-Month Extension

- ★ Microfinance Institutions Network (MFIN) extended the deadline for compliance with the “maximum three-lender per borrower” rule by three months, now applying until the end of March 2025.
- ★ The rule aims to address the microfinance sectors asset quality stress by limiting borrowers to loans from a maximum of three lenders, reducing excessive indebtedness.
- ★ MFIN had previously set a cap of four lenders per borrower, which has now been reduced.
- ★ MFIN introduced stricter lending norms in late November 2024, including capping a borrower’s total outstanding loans at ₹2 lakh, which includes both microfinance and unsecured retail loans.
- ★ MFIN has imposed a restriction on lending to borrowers with overdue loans for more than 60 days and an outstanding amount greater than ₹3,000.
- ★ The microfinance sector’s asset quality has deteriorated, with the gross non-performing assets (NPAs) ratio rising to 11.6% by the end of September 2024, the highest in 18 months.
- ★ MFIN is one of the two self-regulatory organizations for the microfinance sector, the other being Sa-Dhan

RBI Permits National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development

- ★ On January 1, 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a circular allowing the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) to participate as an All-India Financial Institution (AIFI) in financial markets.
- ★ The decision aligns with the RBI’s earlier notifications and master directions governing AIFIs under the RBI Act, 1934.
- ★ NaBFID is now permitted to undertake credit default swaps and repurchase (repo) transactions, in line with the Master Directions on Credit Derivatives (2022) and Repo Transactions (2018).
- ★ NaBFID was established under the NaBFID Act, 2021, as the primary institution for infrastructure financing in India.
- ★ NaBFID is regulated and supervised by the RBI as an All-India Financial Institution (AIFI).

- ★ The directions issued by RBI are based on the powers conferred under Section 45W of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, in conjunction with Section 45U of the Act.

Federal Bank Introduces Fedone, A Digital Platform for Corporate Banking

- ★ Federal Bank, one of India's largest private sector banks, launched FedOne, a new digital transaction banking platform.
- ★ The platform is powered by Nucleus Softwares FinnAxia solution
- ★ The platform was implemented after 10-month collaboration between Federal Bank and Nucleus Software.
- ★ The platform aims to modernize the bank's corporate banking services and streamline treasury operations.
- ★ It is designed to enhance working capital management capabilities and provide faster service delivery for corporate customers.
- ★ Nucleus Software, the technology partner, supports over 200 financial institutions in 50 countries.
- ★ Federal Bank's Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) stood at 15.20% as of September 30, 2024.
- ★ Federal Bank operates Representative Offices in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, as well as an IFSC Banking Unit in GIFT City.

SBI Introduces TAB-Based Digital Onboarding for NRI Account Opening

- ★ State Bank of India (SBI) has launched a TAB-based digital onboarding process for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to facilitate the opening of NRE (Non-Resident External) and NRO (Non-Resident Ordinary) accounts.
- ★ The initiative aims to streamline the account opening process, offering it across SBI branches in India and select foreign offices.
- ★ The process eliminates the need for physical paperwork, utilizing digital tools to verify documents and speed up the account opening.
- ★ NRIs can open accounts denominated in Indian Rupees (NRE/NRO) or Foreign Currency, including FCNR (B) accounts in USD, EURO, GBP, CAD, JPY, and AUD.
- ★ NRE and NRO accounts can be either running accounts or fixed deposits, while FCNR (B) accounts are only available as fixed deposits.

State Bank of India Introduces Two New Deposit Schemes

- ★ State Bank of India (SBI) has launched two new deposit schemes "Har Ghar Lakhpati" and "Patrons."
- ★ **Har Ghar Lakhpati Scheme:**
 - Type: Pre-calculated Recurring Deposit.
 - Objective: Accumulate a sum of ₹1 lakh or its multiple.
 - Target: Simplifies achieving financial goals by helping customers plan and save effectively.
 - Eligibility: Available to minors, encouraging early financial planning and saving habits.

- **Tenure:** Minimum tenure is 12 months (1 year); maximum tenure is 120 months (10 years).

★ **Patrons Scheme:**

- Type: Term Deposit product.
- Target Audience: Senior citizens aged 80 years or above.
- Interest Rates: Offers enhanced interest rates compared to regular fixed deposits.
- Eligibility: Available to both new and existing term deposit customers.

★ **Fixed Deposit Rates:**

- For tenures above 1 year: 6.80% interest rate.
- For tenures above 2 years: 7.00% interest rate.
- For tenures above 3 years to less than 5 years: 6.75% interest rate.
- For tenures 5-10 years: 6.50% interest rate.

Bharat Connect Set to Launch by March, Marking A UPI Milestone For B2B Payments

- ★ The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) is expected to roll out its Bharat BillPay for Business offering by March
- ★ Bharat Connect, formerly known as Bharat BillPay, will allow businesses to manage B2B payments, operating on a model similar to NPCI's partnerships with third-party application providers (TPAPs).
- ★ The new Bharat BillPay for Business offering will authorize companies to facilitate B2B payments using a real-time payments system similar to how TPAPs enable P2P and P2M transactions on UPI.
- ★ The platforms setup for businesses will resemble the model NPCI uses with TPAPs, which typically cater to peer-to-peer (P2P) and peer-to-merchant (P2M) transactions.

RBI Approves Merger of National and Cosmos Co-operative Banks

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved the merger of National Co-operative Bank (Bangalore) with Cosmos Co-operative Bank (Maharashtra), effective January 6, 2025.
- ★ The RBI sanctioned the merger under Sub-Section (4) of Section 44A and Section 56 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
- ★ Post-merger, the branches of National Co-operative Bank (Bangalore) will operate as branches of Cosmos Co-operative Bank.
- ★ National Co-operative Bank has 13 branches that will be absorbed by Cosmos Co-operative Bank.
- ★ In FY24, Maratha Sahakari Bank and Sahebrao Deshmukh Sahakari Bank also merged with Cosmos Co-operative Bank.
- ★ In July 2023, the RBI imposed withdrawal restrictions on National Co-operative Bank due to weak financial performance, limiting deposit withdrawals to ₹50,000 per account.
- ★ These restrictions were extended until January 24, 2025.

- ★ The merger aligns with RBI's regulatory powers to ensure the stability and health of the banking sector, especially in co-operative banking.

Punjab and Sind Bank to Launch Instant MSME Loan Scheme

- ★ Punjab and Sind Bank plans to launch an instant loan scheme for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), with loans up to ₹25 lakh.
- ★ The scheme will be rolled out this month as part of the bank's initiative to digitally push credit.
- ★ The bank has already introduced digital home loan and vehicle loan schemes, where in-principle approval is granted within 15 minutes.
- ★ These schemes operate on a Straight Through Process (STP), running on a pre-defined Business Rule Engine (BRE), which automates the loan processing and sanctioning stages.
- ★ The automated approach eliminates manual intervention, improving the speed, efficiency, and customer experience in processing loans.
- ★ The STP process will be extended to the MSME loan products, with a focus on cash flow assessment and tracking the digital footprint via account statements.
- ★ The digital loan products allow instant sanctioning, even during holidays, making the process more convenient and reducing default risks.
- ★ The bank plans to launch the digital renewal and sanctioning of Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) by next month.
- ★ Under KCC, farmers can receive up to ₹2 lakh without collateral.
- ★ The bank is also working to provide collateral-free loans under the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) of up to ₹50,000 through its digital platform.

NPCI Enables Seamless Mobility for 3.2 Million Chennai MTC Commuters

- ★ The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has partnered with Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) in Chennai to integrate RuPay on-the-go, a contactless payment solution for public transit.
- ★ Over 3.2 million daily commuters using Chennai MTC will benefit from this efficient and seamless transit system.
- ★ Multi-Modal Ticket Payment: RuPay on-the-go enables multi-modal ticket payment across: Chennai Metro, MTC buses and Chennai Metro parking facilities
- ★ This is facilitated using a single card.
- ★ RuPay on-the-go was launched under the National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) programme, which aims to simplify public transit across multiple cities in India.
- ★ The system offers travellers a hassle-free, contactless experience on metros and buses, using a single card marked with the RuPay contactless symbol.
- ★ RuPay cards also facilitate smooth transactions at merchant outlets.
- ★ The card can be linked with UPI-enabled apps, allowing users to make UPI payments through RuPay Credit Cards on UPI.

Assam Signs MoU with SBI and UBI

- ★ The Assam Government entered into an agreement with the State Bank of India (SBI) and Union Bank of India (UBI) on January 1, 2025.
- ★ This initiative aims to provide over four lakh State Government employees with zero-premium insurance benefits.
- ★ Employees will receive comprehensive financial protection through the following benefits at no extra cost:
 - Term Life Insurance: Ensures financial security for the family in case of the insured's death during the policy period.
 - Accidental Death Insurance: Provides compensation for deaths caused by accidents.
 - Permanent Total and Partial Disability Insurance: Offers financial support for disabilities that may hinder the employee's ability to work.
 - Air Accidental Insurance: Covers risks during air travel accidents.
- ★ This move underscores the Assam Government's commitment to enhancing the welfare and security of its employees.
- ★ The zero-premium model ensures that employees receive these benefits without incurring any additional financial burden.

RBI Issues Draft Formats for Financial Statements of Co-operative Banks

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stated that in terms of Section 29, read with Section 56 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, co-operative banks are required to prepare a balance sheet and profit and loss account as on the last working day of the year in the Forms set out in the Third Schedule of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.
- ★ These forms were notified in 1981.
- ★ Since then, there have been several developments in the financial market as well as accounting standards and practices.
- ★ The Reserve Bank has, accordingly, undertaken a comprehensive review of the formats of the financial statements of the co-operative banks and has released draft formats of the revised Forms and their schedules together with instructions for the compilation of the balance sheet and profit and loss account.

Reserve Bank of India Removes Restrictions on Asirvad Microfinance and DMI Finance

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has lifted the restrictions on Chennai-based Asirvad Micro Finance and Delhi-based DMI Finance, effective immediately.
- ★ The RBI was satisfied with the companies' actions to comply with regulatory guidelines, including revamped processes and systems, and their commitment to ensure adherence to regulations, particularly regarding fairness in loan pricing.
- ★ The RBI had imposed sanctions on four non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) in October 2024, which included Asirvad Microfinance, Arohan Financial Services, DMI Finance, and Navi Finserv (owned by Flipkart co-founder Sachin Bansal), for charging excessive interest rates.

- ★ The initial sanctions were due to concerns about the companies' pricing policies, particularly in terms of their weighted average lending rate (WALR) and the interest spread charged over their cost of funds, which were deemed excessive and non-compliant with RBI regulations.

Bajaj Broking Partners with Tamilnad Mercantile Bank

- ★ Bajaj Broking, a subsidiary of Bajaj Finance Limited, has partnered with Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (TMB) to offer a 3-in-1 account solution.
- ★ The 3-in-1 account combines banking, broking, and investment services, enabling seamless access to all three functions for customers.
- ★ Customers of TMB will now be able to trade online through Bajaj Broking and utilize its diverse range of products and services.
- ★ The platform offers integrated fund transfers, reducing paperwork and providing tech-driven investment options across various products.

Exim Bank of India Raises \$1 Billion via 10-Year USD Bond

- ★ Exim Bank of India raised \$1 billion via a 10-year USD-denominated bond, marking a significant milestone in its international fundraising efforts.
- ★ The bond achieved the lowest-ever spread of 100 basis points over 10-year US treasuries for a BBB-rated issuer in Asia.
- ★ The bond was priced at 5.63%, showcasing favorable investor confidence.
- ★ This issuance reflects the strong confidence of global investors in India's economic prospects and sets a positive outlook for Indian issuers in international capital markets in 2025.
- ★ The transaction was managed by BofA Securities, HSBC, Standard Chartered Bank, Citigroup, and J.P. Morgan, acting as joint lead managers and joint book runners.
- ★ Exim Bank holds credit ratings of BBB-(positive) from S&P, BBB-(stable) from Fitch, and Baa3 (stable) from Moody's.

Punjab National Bank Launches First Cybersecurity Hackathon 2024-25

- ★ Punjab National Bank (PNB) has launched its first Cybersecurity Hackathon 2024-25, with the theme Code Against Malware.
- ★ The hackathon aims to address the rising threat of malware and enhance the nation's cybersecurity defences.
- ★ The event brings together innovators, researchers, and academicians from across India to collaborate on developing advanced solutions for cybersecurity in the banking sector.
- ★ The hackathon focuses on key areas like Malware detection and removal using intelligence-powered tools, Real-time threat monitoring and mitigation, Ransomware resilience solutions and Next-generation antivirus tools and attack surface management.
- ★ The hackathon is held under the guidance of the Ministry of Finance and aligns with the Department of Financial Services (DFS) directive for Public Sector Banks (PSBs) to host annual hackathons.

PNB Metlife Teams Up with Saraswat Co-Operative Bank

- ★ PNB MetLife has entered into a bancassurance partnership with Saraswat Co-operative Bank, one of India's largest urban co-operative banks.
- ★ The partnership aims to provide a range of life insurance solutions, including savings, protection, retirement, and group plans.
- ★ The collaboration will offer insurance products to Saraswat Bank's large customer base, consisting of approximately 30 lakh individuals, across 302 branches nationwide.
- ★ Bancassurance is a model where banks partner with insurance companies to sell insurance products.
- ★ The bank earns a commission from the insurance company, while the insurer benefits from the bank's vast distribution network.
- ★ The partnership aims to enhance financial inclusion by addressing the protection gap and increasing insurance penetration in underserved and uninsured segments of the population.

Mobikwik Teams Up with Piramal Capital and Housing Finance

- ★ MobiKwik Systems has entered into a strategic partnership with Piramal Capital and Housing Finance to provide personal loans to MobiKwik customers.
- ★ The partnership aims to enhance access to affordable credit solutions, enabling MobiKwik users to apply for and receive personal loans seamlessly through the MobiKwik platform.
- ★ The personal loan offering is designed to cater to various financial needs of individuals, such as education, medical expenses, travel, and other consumption purposes.
- ★ The loan amount for ZIP EMI ranges from INR 50,000 to INR 2,00,000.

Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU-IND) and National Housing Bank (NHB) Sign MoU

- ★ The Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND) and the National Housing Bank (NHB) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance co-ordination and information exchange in the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing.
- ★ The MoU aims to streamline reporting processes for housing finance companies to improve their compliance with the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and related regulations.
- ★ NHB is the regulatory authority overseeing the regulation and licensing of housing finance companies in India.
- ★ It operates under the Ministry of Finance, Government of India.
- ★ FIU-IND is an agency under the Department of Revenue, Government of India.
- ★ It collects and analyzes financial intelligence related to offenses under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA)

Reserve Bank of India Launches Daily Variable Rate Repo Auctions

- ★ On a review of current and evolving liquidity conditions, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to conduct Variable Rate Repo (VRR) auctions on all working days in Mumbai with reversal taking place on the next working day, until further notice.

- ★ The reversal of VRR auction conducted on a Friday will take place on the ensuing Monday or the next working day, if Monday is a holiday in Mumbai.
- ★ The auction will be conducted between 10:00 AM and 10:30 AM every day.
- ★ The first such auction will be conducted on January 16, 2025, Thursday, for an amount of ₹50,000 crore.
- ★ Standalone Primary Dealers will be allowed to participate in these auctions, along with all other eligible participants.
 - The auction will be conducted on CBS (e-Kuber) platform.
 - The minimum bid amount for the auction would be Rupees one crore and multiples thereof.
 - The allotment would be in multiples of Rupees 1 crore.
 - Banks would be required to place their bids in percentage terms up to two decimal places.
 - Banks can place multiple bids.

NPCI International Teams Up with Magnati to Boost UPI Acceptance in UAE

- ★ NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL), the international arm of India's National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has partnered with UAE-based payment solution provider Magnati to expand QR-based Unified Payments Interface (UPI) merchant payments in the Middle East.
- ★ The partnership aims to enhance UPI-based payments via point-of-sale (POS) terminals in the UAE, primarily for Indian travelers.
- ★ The goal is to enable more merchants in the UAE to accept UPI as a payment method, thus catering to the 12 million Indian tourists traveling to Dubai and the UAE annually.
- ★ The partnership will first focus on offering UPI acceptance at Dubai Duty Free to improve the shopping and payment experience for Indian tourists.
- ★ The initiative is expected to extend UPI acceptance to key merchant categories like retail, hospitality, transport, and supermarkets in the UAE.
- ★ This partnership demonstrates India's leadership in digital payment innovation.
- ★ It sets a benchmark for cross-border payment interoperability and strengthens economic and cultural ties between India and the UAE.

RBI Infuses ₹76,000 Crore into Banking System

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) injected ₹75,772 crore into the banking system via a variable rate repo (VRR) operation.
- ★ The primary goal was to boost liquidity and rein in call money rates, which are the short-term interest rates at which banks lend to each other.
- ★ The move was made to ensure there is sufficient liquidity in the financial system, especially during periods of tight liquidity.
- ★ This initiative aimed to control the fluctuations in call money rates, which can affect the overall cost of borrowing in the economy.
- ★ This infusion is aimed at easing liquidity conditions and preventing call money rates from rising significantly above the current repo rate of 6.5%.

- ★ The ₹75,772-crore liquidity injection will be reversed.
- ★ The weighted average call rate (WACR), reflecting overnight borrowing costs for banks, stood at 6.60% on Jan 20, 2025, 10 basis points higher than the repo rate of 6.5%, due to liquidity deficit.

Bajaj Finance has Entered into a Partnership with Bharti Airtel

- ★ Bajaj Finance and Bharti Airtel has partnered to create a digital platform for financial services, targeting Airtel's vast customer base.
- ★ The platform will cater to 375 million customers of Airtel and the 1.2 million distribution network of the telecom company.
- ★ Bajaj Finance's products will be available through Airtel's stores and initially on the Airtel Thanks App, offering a seamless and secure customer experience.
- ★ Bajaj Finance will offer a diversified suite of 27 product lines.
- ★ Initially, two products—gold loan and business loan—are available.
- ★ By March 2025, the companies plan to have four products, including co-branded Insta EMI cards and personal loans, with plans to offer close to 10 products by the end of the year.
- ★ Airtel aims to build Airtel Finance as a strategic asset and is focused on financial inclusion.
- ★ The combined reach, scale, and distribution strength of both companies will drive the partnership's success.
- ★ Customers can apply for the Airtel-Bajaj Finserv Insta EMI Card through the app and later at Airtel stores, which will provide access to offers from Bajaj Finance.

Power Finance Corporation Signs 120 Bn Yen Loan Pact with Japan Bank

- ★ Power Finance Corporation (PFC) has signed a loan agreement with Japan Bank for International Co-operation (JBIC) for 120 billion Japanese yen (~₹6,600 crore).
- ★ JBIC will provide JPY 72 billion, with the balance funded by commercial banks.
- ★ The funds will be used to finance PFC's renewable energy portfolio, supporting India's transition to non-fossil-fuel-based energy sources.
- ★ The loan is long-term, with tenure of up to 20 years.
- ★ This loan is part of JBIC's initiative 'Global action for Reconciling Economic growth and Environmental preservation (GREEN)'.
- ★ The deal represents the largest green financing agreement executed by JBIC with any company in India.

Shriram Life Insurance Introduces Shriram Life Sunishchit Laabh Plan

- ★ Shriram Life Insurance has launched Shriram Life Sunishchit Laabh, a non-participating individual savings plan that guarantees high returns of up to 668% of the total premium paid.
- ★ The plan offers flexible entry options for individuals aged 30 days to 60 years, with a minimum ticket size starting at 30,000 annually, ₹15,500 half-yearly, ₹8,000 quarterly, and ₹3,000 monthly.

- ★ It features flexible maturity income payout options, including tax-free payouts for up to 40 years (until a maximum age of 101), ensuring long-term income even during retirement.
- ★ The plan also offers death benefits up to 160 times the annualized premium, and customers can modify the payout modes during the policy term.
- ★ Ideal for retirement planning, children's education, family protection, or creating a long-term financial safety net, the plan also includes loyalty rewards and optional riders.
- ★ Shriram Life Insurance provides term, endowment, ULIPs, and annuities at affordable premiums for both rural and urban middle-class customers, with an in-force policyholder base of over 12 lakh.

TATA AIG Launches CyberEdge

- ★ TATA AIG General Insurance Company, a leading general insurance provider, has introduced CyberEdge, a new cyber insurance solution designed to protect businesses of all sizes against a wide array of cyber risks.
- ★ The policy offers robust financial and operational support, covering forensic investigations, legal fees, data recovery, extortion payments, and losses from business interruptions.
- ★ With a strong commitment to enhancing cybersecurity resilience, CyberEdge aims to capture 25% of the cyber insurance market in the coming 5 years.
- ★ A recent report by Prahar highlighted that 79 million cyberattacks were recorded in India in 2023 and the threat landscape is rapidly evolving.
- ★ It provides immediate access to Tata AIG's panel of incident response experts 24/7/365 during a cyber incident.

IDFC First Bank Partners with RuPay to Unveil FIRST EA₹N RuPay Credit Card

- ★ IDFC FIRST Bank, in collaboration with RuPay, has launched the transformative UPI-enabled RuPay Credit Card named 'FIRST EA₹N'.
- ★ This innovative product is a Fixed Deposit (FD)-backed virtual credit card designed to democratize credit access while offering rewarding benefits for users.
- ★ The FIRST EA₹N RuPay Credit Card enables customers to seamlessly access credit via UPI, a feature that stands out in the financial services industry.
- ★ Backed by an FD, the card ensures universal eligibility, eliminating barriers for those who might face difficulties obtaining traditional credit cards.
- ★ Customers can apply online and instantly access the card, enabling convenient and rewarding transactions.
- ★ Cardholders can use the card for UPI transactions at over 60 million UPI-enabled merchants across India.
- ★ The virtual credit card is issued instantly, allowing immediate use with UPI integration.
- ★ The FD-backed model ensures availability for all customers, providing credit access to individuals new to credit products.

Tata AIA Life Insurance Launches 'Shubh Muhurat'

- ★ Tata AIA Life Insurance has launched 'Shubh Muhurat,' a life insurance solution to help parents save for their child's wedding.
- ★ The solution is suited for parents aged between 31 and 50 years, having children in the age group of 1 to 20 years.
- ★ Investing in this solution early can give the parent long enough to accumulate the desired corpus for the child's grand wedding.
- ★ Shubh Muhurta gives capital guarantee with equity exposure.
- ★ By safeguarding the policy proceeds under the Married Women's Property Act, Shubh Muhurat ensures that the funds intended for the child's marriage are legally protected and will only be available to the nominee regardless of external financial claims.
- ★ This plan offers capital guarantees with equity exposure, long-term wealth growth, and tailored benefits like immediate death benefit, premium waiver, and maturity payouts to ensure uninterrupted financial planning for a child's wedding.

ACKO Launches E-Challan Service to Simplify Traffic Fine Payments

- ★ ACKO, a leading digital-first insurance provider, has introduced an innovative e-challan service for seamless traffic fine payments in Karnataka.
- ★ Citizens can check their e-challan status and pay traffic fines directly through the ACKO app or website, eliminating long queues and tedious processes.
- ★ The service includes Bangalore's traffic challan system, enhancing convenience for motorists across the state.
- ★ The e-challan service provides a user-friendly digital platform for traffic fine payments, reducing frustrations associated with traditional methods and ensuring ease of compliance for motorists.
- ★ It encourages drivers to pay fines promptly, fostering accountability and responsibility among them.
- ★ By freeing up administrative resources, the service allows traffic authorities to focus more on improving road safety.
- ★ This initiative aligns with Karnataka's vision of becoming a digitally progressive state by promoting transparency and efficiency in traffic fine management.
- ★ ACKO's e-challan service reflects its dedication to leveraging technology for innovative solutions that benefit citizens and administrators, contributing to improved road safety and governance.

YES Bank Launches Frictionless Finance Accelerator Programme

- ★ YES Bank, in collaboration with the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH) and the P. Jain Institute of Management and Research (SPJIMR), has launched the Frictionless Finance Accelerator Programme on National Startup Day.
- ★ This initiative aims to support fintech startups in overcoming challenges, scaling innovations, and promoting financial inclusion in India.

- ★ India's startup ecosystem, with over 5 lakh registered startups and more than 100 unicorns, is rapidly expanding, and fintech startups are playing a significant role in improving access to financial services.
- ★ The programme focuses on creating scalable solutions in key areas, such as digital lending, AI-based risk management, blockchain payments, and financial inclusion.
- ★ Startups participating in the programme will benefit from RBIH's expertise, SPJIMR's academic resources, and YES Bank's industry insights.
- ★ Tools like the YES Connect platform will assist startups in navigating regulatory frameworks and optimizing their business strategies.
- ★ Additionally, the programme will foster partnerships between fintech startups, industry leaders, and regulators.
- ★ YES Bank has a history of supporting fintech startups through initiatives like YES HeadStartup and partnerships, such as the recent collaboration with Vegapay for UPI-linked credit solutions.
- ★ This accelerator programme underscores the bank's commitment to co-creating innovative financial solutions.

UGRO Capital and iSPIRT to Launch Priority Sector Lenders Association of India

- ★ iSPIRT has collaborated with UGRO Capital to launch the Priority Sector Lenders Association of India (PSLAI), a Section 8 company aimed at addressing credit challenges in priority sectors, particularly Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- ★ Founding members of PSLAI include UGRO Capital, IIFL, and fintech companies like GetVantage and GetGrowth Capital.
- ★ PSLAI focuses on promoting loans under the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Priority Sector Lending (PSL) norms, which are designed to support sectors like agriculture, small businesses, and affordable housing.
- ★ Under RBI rules, banks are required to allocate 40% of their Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) to PSL, which amounts to approximately ₹64 trillion in loans annually.
- ★ iSPIRT believes that India's digital infrastructure offers significant potential to expand credit access for MSMEs, with the possibility of increasing credit in this sector to ₹130 trillion in the next 3-5 years.
- ★ PSL loans are often smaller and riskier, causing many banks to meet their PSL targets indirectly, such as through securitisation deals.
- ★ Among the PSL categories, agriculture receives the largest share of funding.

PNB Becomes First Indian Bank to Launch Clari5's NCRP

- ★ Punjab National Bank (PNB) has achieved a remarkable milestone by becoming the first Indian bank to implement Clari5's NCRP Integration Solution, a cutting-edge platform integrated with the Indian Cybercrime Co-ordination Centre's (I4C) National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP).
- ★ This marks a significant step toward real-time cybercrime complaint management and fraud prevention.

- ★ The system ensures real-time complaint handling across banking channels such as Internet Banking, Mobile Banking, ATMs, Debit Cards, UPI, IMPS, and more.
- ★ The platform is designed to accommodate future integrations, including credit cards and Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), aligning with I4C's evolving standards.
- ★ Complaints are prioritized using First-In-First-Out logic for faster resolution.
- ★ Fraudulent accounts are automatically frozen based on predefined rules, such as complaints exceeding a specific threshold.
- ★ Important accounts are excluded from unnecessary complaint processes to avoid disruptions.
- ★ Real-time insights and automated reprocessing ensure data integrity during system downtimes, offering 100% reliability.

Indian Bank Partners with Escorts Kubota Limited for Financing Solutions

- ★ Indian Bank has partnered with Escorts Kubota Limited, a manufacturer of tractors and construction equipment, to offer financing solutions to its dealers and customers.
- ★ The partnership aims to provide working capital and tractor loans at affordable interest rates, covering Escorts Kubota's full product range, including Powertrac, Farmtrac, and Kubota tractors.
- ★ Indian Bank Executive Director Ashutosh Choudhury emphasized that the collaboration would enable quick and hassle-free financing for dealers, farmers, and prospective customers.
- ★ He added that this initiative aligns with the bank's commitment to advancing financial inclusion and digitalization across the country.
- ★ Through Indian Bank's digital platform, Escorts Kubota Ltd dealers can easily access these benefits, streamlining the financing process and supporting the agricultural and construction sectors.

Policybazaar.ae Launches 'PB Advantage' in UAE

- ★ Policybazaar.ae, the UAE's leading online insurance marketplace, has introduced PB Advantage, a revolutionary initiative aimed at transforming the health insurance experience in the UAE.
- ★ It offers innovative features and exclusive benefits, ensuring a seamless journey from policy purchase to claims processing.
- ★ A dedicated claims desk ensures quicker resolutions for customers.
- ★ It automatically restores the full coverage amount after the first claim, providing additional coverage for unrelated conditions.
- ★ For example, an AED 1 million policy is recharged with another AED 1 million for future claims.
- ★ Adds 10% to the sum assured for each claim-free year, up to a maximum of five years.

RBI Approves Establishment of NUCFDC

- ★ Union Home Minister and Minister of Co-operation Shri Amit Shah will inaugurate the corporate office of the National Urban Co-operative Finance and Development Corporation (NUCFDC) in Mumbai.

- ★ The event will mark the launch of several initiatives aimed at achieving Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of "Sehkar Se Samriddhi" (Prosperity through Co-operation).
- ★ During the occasion, Shri Amit Shah will release the annual calendar of activities for the International Year of Co-operatives 2025, highlighting efforts to promote co-operative organizations across India and enhance their global presence.
- ★ Additionally, he will launch training programs designed to improve the operational and managerial capabilities of 10,000 newly formed multipurpose co-operative societies.
- ★ A ranking framework for primary co-operative societies will also be introduced to enhance their transparency, efficiency, and performance.
- ★ The NUCFDC, established with the approval of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), aims to address challenges faced by approximately 1,500 Urban Co-operative Banks (UCBs).
- ★ It will provide these banks with essential IT infrastructure and operational support while functioning as a self-regulatory organization under RBI supervision.
- ★ The RBI has mandated the NUCFDC to secure a paid-up capital of ₹300 crore by February 8, 2025, within one year of its registration.
- ★ This initiative underscores the Government's dedication to strengthening the co-operative sector and empowering urban co-operative banks, contributing to economic growth and sustainable development across the country.

Bank of Baroda Signs Memorandum of Understanding with South Central Railway

- ★ Bank of Baroda (BoB) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with South Central Railway (SCR) to provide a comprehensive salary package for over 85,000 employees across 6 states: Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.
- ★ The initiative includes enhanced personal accident insurance coverage, free Hospicash facilities, and special offers on retail loans, debit cards, and credit cards.
- ★ Unique benefits comprise reimbursement for girl child marriage (aged 18-25), higher education cover, and transportation of imported medicines.
- ★ Employees will also receive personal accident insurance of up to ₹1.25 crore for on-duty accidental death and ₹1 crore for off-duty incidents, alongside a group term life insurance facility of ₹10 lakh.
- ★ Additionally, retired employees up to 70 years of age can avail of these benefits if their pensions are routed through the Baroda Government Employee Salary Account, in accordance with the bank's guidelines.

State Bank of India Payments Partnered with Pine Labs

- ★ State Bank of India Payments and Pine Labs have announced an expanded partnership, building on their 12-year collaboration.
- ★ SBI Payments, a joint venture between the State Bank of India and Hitachi Payment Services Pvt. Ltd., has joined forces with Pine Labs, a leading merchant commerce platform, to further strengthen their alliance.

- ★ The partnership aims to accelerate the adoption of digital payments and commerce solutions across India.
- ★ By leveraging SBI Payments' vast distribution network and Pine Labs' advanced merchant solutions, the collaboration seeks to deliver a seamless checkout experience for businesses and consumers.
- ★ A key highlight of the partnership is the introduction of a comprehensive merchant digitization suite, which enables merchants to Streamline workflows, Digitize operations, Improve efficiency and Drive sales growth
- ★ The collaboration underscores a shared commitment to financial inclusion and digital empowerment for merchants nationwide.

Jio Introduces 'JioSoundPay'

- ★ Reliance Jio has launched JioSoundPay, an innovative feature for its JioBharat device, designed to revolutionize payment operations for small-scale merchants across India.
- ★ The feature provides instant, multilingual audio confirmations for UPI payments, eliminating the need for a separate sound box.
- ★ Currently, small and micro merchants spend approximately ₹125 per month on sound boxes, but JioSoundPay is offered free for life, allowing JioBharat users to save nearly ₹1,500
- ★ This solution is expected to benefit around 5 crore merchants, including Kirana stores, vegetable vendors, and roadside eateries, by enhancing cost-efficiency and eliminating the need for external devices.
- ★ The move is part of Reliance Jio's strategy to strengthen its market presence following subscriber losses.
- ★ By disrupting the sound box segment, currently dominated by competitors like Paytm, Jio aims to empower small businesses and expand its reach across the country.

SEBI Launches Dharohar

- ★ On January 26, 2025, during the 76th Republic Day celebrations, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) unveiled Dharohar – Milestones in the Indian Securities Market, a comprehensive digital knowledge repository.
- ★ This initiative chronicles the vibrant history of India's securities market, spanning over 150 years of organized trading and highlighting its evolution into a diverse and dynamic ecosystem.
- ★ Dharohar is a state-of-the-art repository designed to serve a broad audience — students, investors, researchers, journalists, market participants, and the general public.
- ★ The platform provides an immersive and educational experience, offering valuable insights into the market's diverse products, participants, and institutions.
- ★ Dharohar is not static; it is a living repository expected to grow continually with fresh content, ensuring users gain access to the latest and most relevant information about India's securities market.

- ★ SEBI has expressed gratitude to the many contributors who made this initiative possible, including former chairpersons, whole-time members, scripophilists, market infrastructure institutions, and industry experts.
- ★ This initiative reflects SEBI's dedication to preserving the rich legacy of India's securities market while fostering greater awareness and understanding among diverse stakeholders.
- ★ By documenting key milestones, Dharohar stands as a testament to the market's growth and resilience, celebrating its contribution to the nation's economic journey.
- ★ Dharohar is freely accessible online at Transform Your Investments with "Traditional Wisdom" Using "Modern Tools".

Ratnakar Bank Limited Partners with Piramal Finance

- ★ Ratnakar Bank Limited (RBL Bank), a private sector bank, and Piramal Capital and Housing Finance (Piramal Finance), a subsidiary of Piramal Enterprises Limited, have announced a strategic co-lending partnership.
- ★ The collaboration focuses on providing loans to middle- and low-income borrowers in rural and semi-urban regions.
- ★ This is Piramal Finance's third co-lending partnership, following similar collaborations with Axis Bank and the Central Bank of India.
- ★ The partnership combines RBL Bank's financial expertise and a network of over 2,000 touchpoints with Piramal Finance's advanced loan processing technology ('High Tech + High Touch') and 508 branches across 13,000 pin codes.
- ★ Together, they aim to address the credit gap for MSMEs, home loan borrowers, and underserved communities in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.
- ★ The collaboration seeks to leverage Piramal Finance's technology-driven credit assessment tools and RBL Bank's rigorous underwriting practices to deliver competitive interest rates and tailored lending solutions.

Fintech Firm Cred Joins Indian Central Bank's Digital Currency Project

- ★ One MobiKwik Systems and Cred have initiated their individual e-rupee pilot programs in partnership with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- ★ This collaboration makes them the first fintech platforms to join hands with the RBI for implementing the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).
- ★ Yes Bank has been selected as the primary sponsor bank to facilitate the issuance of CBDC for both of these third-party application providers.
- ★ With this move, Cred and MobiKwik became the first fintech platforms to partner with the RBI on the central bank digital currency.
- ★ Additionally, Yes Bank will be the first sponsor bank to enable the CBDC issuance for both these third-party application providers.
- ★ MobiKwik has introduced the e₹ wallet, which is a CBDC wallet now accessible to all Android users.

- ★ Cred has introduced an e-rupee wallet for a limited group of users, with Yes Bank managing the issuance of e-rupee tokens in these wallets.
- ★ While MobiKwik has fully launched its e₹ wallet for all Android users, Cred has introduced a beta version with limited accessibility.
- ★ In the coming months, Cred will introduce programmable merchant payments, integration with Cred Pay, and PIN-less transactions for payments below ₹500.
- ★ Cred members who are whitelisted for this service will be able to make bank account-linked UPI payments and transfer funds to other CBDC wallets after completing video KYC.
- ★ The Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), also known as the Digital Rupee or e₹, is officially defined by the RBI as a digital legal tender issued by a central bank.
- ★ It is equivalent to sovereign currency and can be exchanged one-to-one with physical currency.

HSBC Launches TravelOne Credit Card in India

- ★ Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) has introduced the TravelOne Credit Card, designed to cater to the needs of frequent travelers.
- ★ The card offers instant reward redemptions across multiple airline and hotel partners, allowing users to convert points into air miles and hotel stays via the HSBC mobile app.
- ★ New users who spend ₹10,000 within the first 30 days will receive ₹1,000 cashback, ₹3,000 PostCard vouchers and Three months of EazyDiner Prime Membership
- ★ Users spending ₹1 lakh in the first 90 days will earn 3,000 bonus reward points.

Narayana Health launches 'Arya'

- ★ After launching its first insurance product, 'Aditi,' in July 2024, Narayana Health Insurance has now introduced 'Arya,' a high-coverage health insurance plan aimed at addressing gaps in the healthcare industry.
- ★ The plan offers hospitalization coverage ranging from ₹25 lakh to ₹1 crore, with flexible top-up options starting at ₹25,000.
- ★ Focusing on preventive healthcare, 'Arya' provides consultations with general practitioners, pediatricians, and OBGYNs, along with significant savings on diagnostics, specialist consultations, and medications.
- ★ Additional conveniences include home sample collection, free medicine delivery, and access to CAP-certified labs.
- ★ A key highlight of the plan is its day-one benefits, ensuring immediate coverage upon policy activation for eligible applicants.
- ★ Currently available in Bengaluru, Narayana Health Insurance plans to expand 'Arya' nationwide in the coming months.

ECONOMY

Interest Rates Remain Unchanged on National Small Saving Schemes

- ★ The Union Ministry of Finance has made no change in the interest rates on the various schemes under the National Small Saving Scheme, for the last quarters of the 2024-25 fiscal year.
- ★ The interest rate will remain unchanged from 1st January to 31st March 2025.
- ★ The Union Ministry of Finance has reviewed the interest rates on the small saving schemes every quarter since 2016.
- ★ The National Small Savings Schemes are grouped into three categories – Post office deposits, savings certificates, and social security schemes.

Post Office Deposits & Interest Rates:

- ★ Under the Post Office deposits, there are saving accounts and time deposits (recurring and fixed)
- ★ Saving Accounts:
 - The minimum account opening requirement is ₹500 and no maximum limit.
 - The interest rate is 4% per year.
- ★ Recurring Deposit:
 - The minimum account opening is ₹100 and ₹10 per month.
 - There is no maximum deposit limit.
 - The interest rate is 6.7% per annum.
- ★ Time Deposit Accounts:
 - The maturity (duration) of the account is 1 to 5 years (interest rate varies from 6.9 % to 7.5 % per year depending upon the duration).
 - The minimum account opening is ₹1000 and there is no maximum deposit limit.
- ★ National Monthly Income Account:
 - The duration of the account is 5 years and the interest rate is ₹7.4 % per year.
- ★ National Citizen Savings Scheme:
 - It is for persons above 60 years.
 - The interest rate is 8.2% per year and it is paid every quarter.
- ★ Sukanya Samridhi Yojana:
 - For girl children below 10 years of age.
 - Rate of Interest: 8.2% per year.

Saving Certificates:

- ★ National Saving Certificates (NSC):
 - The minimum account opening amount is ₹1000 and no maximum limit.
 - Interest rate: 7.7% per year.

- ★ Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP):
 - The minimum account opening is ₹1000 and no maximum limit.
 - The interest rate is 7.5% and the deposit amount doubles in 115 months.
- ★ Mahila Samman Saving Certificates:
 - Minimum account opening ₹1000 and maximum ₹2 lakh. It is for women only.
 - Interest rate: 7.5% per year.

Ramesh Chand to Head the Working Group on the Revision of WPI Base

- ★ The Government of India has set up a Working Group to revise the base year of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and also suggest a road map to gradually transit from the existing WPI to the Producer Price Index.
- ★ The base year of the present WPI is 2011-12 and it is to be switched to 2022-23.
- ★ The notification was issued by the Government of India on 2 January 2025.
- ★ The Working Group will submit its report to the Office of the Economic Adviser at the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) within 18 months.
- ★ The Working Group will be headed by Professor Ramesh Chand, a member of the NITI Aayog, and consists of 16 other members and a member secretary. The Deputy Director General, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) as the Member Secretary of the Working Group.
- ★ Following are the terms of reference of the Ramesh Chand Working Group.
 - Suggest the commodities that are to be included in the WPI and PPI with the base year 2022-23 in the light of structural changes in the economy.
 - Review and suggest changes in the existing system of price collection.
 - Suggest computational methodology to be adopted for WPI / PPI.
 - Examine the Technical Advisory Committee on Statistics of Prices & Cost of Living methodology for compilation of PPI and suggest any change in it.
 - Recommend roadmap for transition from WPI to PPI.

UN Report: Indian Economy to Grow 6.6% In 2025, 6.7% In 2026

- ★ The United Nations flagship report “World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025” has predicted that the Indian economy is likely to grow by 6.6% in 2025 and 6.7% in 2026.
- ★ The report which was released by the United Nations on 9 January 2025, expects the world economy to grow by 2.8 % in 2025.
- ★ The United Nations follows calendar years (January-December) while the Indian Government follows a fiscal year April - March national accounting method.
- ★ The National Statistical Office (NSO) in its first advance estimates of gross domestic product (GDP) for the fiscal year 2024-25 has estimated a GDP growth of 6.4%.
- ★ In 2022-23 the growth rate of the Indian GDP was 7% and in 2023-24 it was 8.2%.
- ★ The Indian economy is expected to grow by 6.6% in 2025 and by 6.7% in 2026.

- ★ The world economy is expected to grow by 2.8 percent in 2025.

India Targets \$1 Trillion Export by 2030 with \$250 Billion from Engineering Sector

- ★ Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal outlined the Indian Government's ambitious export goals, with a target of \$1 trillion in exports by 2030.
- ★ This includes \$250 billion from the engineering sector, which comprises areas like automobiles, equipment, and other related industries.
- ★ The engineering sector currently contributes 25% of India's total exports.
- ★ Barthwal emphasized that this sector will play a critical role in achieving the \$1 trillion export target, with a focus on expanding exports from engineering-based industries.
- ★ India's transition to cleaner energy technologies is expected to drive demand for net-zero carbon technologies, opening up new avenues for exports.
- ★ Ongoing projects include the modernization of ports, airports, railways, and broadening of roads, which will support export growth.

Government Sets Target to Form 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)

- ★ The Indian Government aims to establish 10,000 new Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) by the end of FY25, five years after the launch of the central sector scheme for their formation.
- ★ This initiative, which began in 2020 with a budget of ₹6,865 crore, has already seen the registration of 9,268 FPOs as co-operatives and producers' companies, with 732 more registrations.
- ★ The initiative aims to boost farmers' income by aggregating agricultural produce, improve market access and reduce cost of cultivation by acting as bulk suppliers of various agri-inputs.
- ★ Financial assistance of up to ₹18 lakh per FPO for three years is provided under the scheme. Additionally, matching equity grants up to ₹2,000 per farmer member with a limit of ₹15 lakh per FPO are available.
- ★ Over 8,600 FPOs are using the Government's Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) platform to sell agricultural products like rice, pulses, millets, honey, spices, and value-added products.
- ★ Farmers also purchase agricultural inputs like seeds, pesticides, and herbicides through ONDC.

BUSINESS NEWS

Blinkit Launches 10-Minute Ambulance Service in Gurgaon

- ★ Blinkit, a quick-commerce platform, has introduced a 10-minute ambulance service in select areas of Gurgaon.
- ★ Currently operational with five ambulances, the service is in its pilot stage.
- ★ CEO Albinder Dhindsa emphasized that the initiative aims to solve a critical problem, with profit not being the focus.

- ★ The ambulances are outfitted with basic medical equipment to address immediate healthcare needs.
- ★ Blinkit aims to scale the service nationwide over the next two years, targeting all major cities.

RBI Approves HDFC Bank's acquisition of 9.5% Stake in Kotak Bank, AU, and Capital Small Finance Banks

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved HDFC Bank's plan to acquire an aggregate stake of up to 9.5% in Kotak Mahindra Bank, AU Small Finance Bank, and Capital Small Finance Bank.
- ★ The RBI's approval is valid until January 2, 2026.
- ★ HDFC Bank and its group entities (including HDFC Mutual Fund, HDFC Life Insurance, HDFC ERGO General Insurance, and HDFC Pension Fund) are restricted to an aggregate holding of 9.5% of the share capital or voting rights in the three banks.
- ★ HDFC Bank needs to ensure that its group entities' combined holding does not exceed the 9.5% cap.
- ★ While HDFC Bank does not plan to invest directly in these banks due to the 5% investment cap for group entities, it sought RBI approval to increase investment limits.

DPIIT Partners with Stride Ventures

- ★ The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has partnered with Stride Ventures, a leading venture debt firm, to catalyze the growth of Indian startups and expand their global reach.
- ★ This collaboration will provide financial support, strategic mentorship, and market access, driving the growth of startups and contributing to India's economic agenda of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship for overall growth.
- ★ The partnership supports the Make in India and Make for the World strategies, focusing on sectors like manufacturing, consumer goods, B2B, and cleantech to boost entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment.
- ★ Startups from tier-2 and tier-3 cities will receive specialized guidance, mentorship, and access to a global network of mentors, fostering innovation in regions beyond major metros.
- ★ The initiative will also raise awareness about various fundraising instruments, especially venture debt, enabling startups to pursue their growth aspirations.

Reserve Bank of India Increases Gold Reserves by 8 Tonnes in November 2024

- ★ According to the World Gold Council (WGC), In November 2024, central banks globally added a total of 53 tonnes of gold to their reserves.
- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) contributed 8 tonnes of this total.
- ★ With the additional 8 tonnes in November, the RBI's total gold holdings increased to 876 tonnes.
- ★ RBI's year-to-date gold purchases for 2024 stand at 73 tonnes, making it the second-largest buyer of gold for the year, after Poland.

- ★ Poland's National Bank (NBP) emerged as the largest buyer of gold in November 2024, adding 21 tonnes to its reserves.
- ★ Central banks, especially those from emerging markets, continued to buy gold in 2024 to secure a stable and secure asset amid global economic uncertainty.

SEBI Imposes ₹9 Lakh Penalty on Stockholding Services

- ★ The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has imposed a ₹9 lakh penalty on Stockholding Services for violating regulatory norms.
- ★ The violations were identified during SEBI's thematic inspection conducted between April 2022 and June 2023.
- ★ There were lapses in the Know Your Customer (KYC) verification process.
- ★ There was a mismatch in bank account details.
- ★ Inadequate systems were found to ensure margin requirements were proportional to the client's declared income proof.
- ★ Multiple UCCs were mapped to a single common email ID or mobile number.
- ★ There were lapses in the due diligence of relationship data for over 1,100 UCCs.

Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) and National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX)

- ★ The Colombo Stock Exchange (CSE) and National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX) of India have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate on the development of derivatives and commodity products in Sri Lanka.
- ★ This partnership aims to enhance the product offering and trading instruments at CSE through knowledge-sharing, technological support, and capacity-building.
- ★ These efforts will focus on training personnel in areas like technology, systems, and regulations.
- ★ The collaboration is expected to foster mutual growth, expand market offerings, attract new participants, and contribute to a more sustainable and efficient trading ecosystem.
- ★ Dilshan Wirasekara, Chairman of CSE, highlighted that this initiative is a key step in diversifying Sri Lanka's capital market offerings and introducing world-class trading facilities.

Air India Launches eZ Booking

- ★ Air India has unveiled eZ Booking, an AI-powered feature designed to streamline the ticket booking process, allowing customers to book their flights with fewer steps.
- ★ The feature is currently exclusive to Maharaja Club members, Air India's loyalty programme.
- ★ eZ Booking simplifies the booking experience by enabling customers to Benefits of eZ Booking.
- ★ The feature simplifies ticket booking, making it more efficient, user-friendly, and faster.
- ★ eZ Booking's patent-pending design has won the Red Dot Design Concepts Award and is now showcased at the Red Dot Design Museum in Singapore.

Bharat Interface for Money Partners with FinTech Yatra 2025

- ★ Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM), powered by NPCI BHIM Services Limited (NBSL), has joined hands with FinTech Yatra 2025 to promote financial inclusion and digital literacy across India.
- ★ Over 200 individuals from NGOs will be trained to educate communities about secure digital payment practices, with a focus on rural and remote areas.
- ★ Rahul Handa, Chief Business Officer of NBSL, emphasized that this initiative aligns with BHIM's mission to bridge the digital divide and promote efficient digital payment solutions.
- ★ The 10,000 km journey aims to connect fintech innovators with financial institutions, venture capitalists, and stakeholders to foster innovation in India's financial ecosystem.
- ★ BHIM is an Indian state-owned mobile payment app developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), based on the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

BIMTECH Launches Blockchain-Based Currency BIMCOIN

- ★ Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH) has launched BIMCOIN, a blockchain-based digital currency designed specifically for its ecosystem.
- ★ This initiative marks a significant step in fintech innovation within the education sector, making BIMTECH the first business management institute in India to introduce such a platform, following IIT Madras.
- ★ It operates on a permissioned blockchain, ensuring secure, transparent, and instant.
- ★ It also facilitates seamless payments between students, vendors, and administrators.
- ★ It was inspired by Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) models and the Viksit Bharat 2047 initiative.
- ★ BIMTECH partnered with Kalp Decentra Foundation to launch a Blockchain Learning Centre on campus.
- ★ BIMCOIN serves as an educational platform for students to gain hands-on experience in blockchain, fintech, and digital currencies.

DEFENCE

15th Aero India 2025

- ★ The latest edition of Asia's biggest biennial air show and aviation exhibition — Aero India 2025 will be held at the Air Force Station, Yelahanka in Bengaluru, Karnataka.
- ★ The 15th edition of the Aero India show will be held from 10-14 February 2025.
- ★ Aero India will showcase India's growth in aerospace and defence capabilities.
- ★ On the 13th and 14th of February, there will be both air displays and exhibitions of a large number of military aircraft from the aerospace sector.

- ★ The Aero India show is organised by the Defence Exhibition Organisation, the Department of Defence Production, and Union Ministry of Defence.
- ★ The theme of the 15th Aero India is 'The Runway to a Billion Opportunities'.
- ★ The event comprises a curtain raiser event, an inaugural event, a Defence Ministers' Conclave, CEOs' Round Table, a Manthan start-up event, air shows, an exhibition, and a trade fair of aerospace companies.
- ★ Aero shows are organised around the world to provide a platform for the civilian and military aviation sectors to display their products and forge new partnerships.
- ★ The Indian Aero show aims to put India on the map of the aviation market as a major buyer and an important collaborator.
- ★ It will provide a platform where Indian companies will forge partnerships with foreign companies so that Indian companies become part of the global value chain in the aviation sector.

Two Fast Patrol Vessels Built by Goa Shipyard Limited Launched in Goa

- ★ Two Fast Patrol Vessels (FPVs) – Amulya and Akshay indigenously designed and constructed by the Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) were launched in the presence of Secretary (Defence Production) Shri Sanjeev Kumar in Goa on January 05, 2025.
- ★ The two FPVs are the third and fourth vessels of the fleet of eight FPVs being constructed by GSL for ICG, underscoring the shipyard's pivotal role in realising the vision of Aatmanirbharta in defence production.
- ★ With over 60% indigenous content, these state-of-the-art FPVs are designed in-house by GSL to meet ICG's specific operational needs.
- ★ With a length of 52 meters and a displacement of 320 tonnes, these vessels will strengthen ICG in protecting offshore assets and island territories.
- ★ Its primary role will be fisheries protection and monitoring island territories, exclusively economic zones and coastal patrol.
- ★ Vessels shall also perform anti-smuggling, anti-piracy and search & rescue operations.

PM Modi Commissions Satpura, Nilgiri and Vagsheer of the Indian Navy

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi commissioned three frontline naval warships and submarines - INS Surat, INS Nilgiri and INS Vagsheer at the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai, Maharashtra on 15 January 2025.
- ★ INS Nilgiri is a stealth frigate and is the lead ship of the Indian Navy's Project 17A, to develop stealth frigates.
- ★ INS Surat is the last of the four guided missile destroyer class ships to be constructed under Project 15B and INS Vagsheer is the sixth and final submarine of the Kalvari class built under Project 75 of the Indian Navy.
- ★ The commissioning of these frontline warships is expected to boost the defence capabilities of the Indian Navy and strengthen India maritime security.
- ★ INS Surat, INS Nilgiri has been indigenously designed and constructed by the defence shipyards -Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai.

- ★ The INS Vagsheer submarine is an Indo-French collaboration which has been constructed by MDL with technology transfer from French Naval Group.

Indian Army to Hold 'Exercise Devil Strike'

- ★ The Indian Armed Forces are set to conduct Exercise Devil Strike from January 16 to 19, 2025, a joint exercise involving the elite airborne soldiers from the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force.
- ★ The exercise will occur at the training areas and firing ranges, validating critical drills and enhancing operational readiness in a challenging environment.
- ★ The exercise comprises complex airborne operations on various aircraft including troop and equipment insertion in hostile terrain.
- ★ Exercise Devil Strike underscores the Indian Armed Forces' commitment to maintaining operational excellence and adaptability in the ever-evolving military landscape.

Pralay, India's First Tactical Quasi-Ballistic Missile, To Debut at Republic Day Parade

- ★ India's 1st tactical quasi-ballistic missile, Pralay, is set to debut at the 26 January, 2025 Republic Day parade.
- ★ As part of the Indian Army's power projection, the missile and its launcher will be showcased.
- ★ However, it remains unclear whether the missile, which completed trials in 2022, has been formally inducted into the armed forces.
- ★ Pralay is an indigenous short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile (SRBM) with a range of 150–500 km.
- ★ It fulfills the Army's requirement for a tactical conventional missile on the battlefield.
- ★ Developed over 7 years and ready for induction in 2022, the missile is expected to enhance the military's war-fighting capabilities significantly.
- ★ It can carry conventional warheads weighing 350–700 kg, giving it formidable punitive capability.
- ★ Pralay is powered by a solid propellant rocket motor and integrates multiple advanced technologies.
- ★ Pralay is designed to evade interceptor missiles.
- ★ Its debut at the Republic Day parade underscores India's advances in indigenous missile technology, reflecting its readiness to address modern military challenges.

Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh Launches 'SANJAY'

- ★ Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh flagged off 'SANJAY – The Battlefield Surveillance System (BSS)' from South Block, New Delhi on January 24, 2025.
- ★ SANJAY is an automated system that integrates inputs from all ground and aerial battlefield sensors, processes them to verify their accuracy, prevents duplication, and fuses them to create a Common Surveillance Picture of the battlefield over secured Army Data Network and Satellite Communication Network.

- ★ This will enhance battlefield transparency and transform future operations through a Centralised Web Application, which will provide inputs to Command & Army Headquarters and the Indian Army Decision Support System.
- ★ The BSS is equipped with state-of-the-art sensors and cutting-edge analytics. It will monitor the vast land borders, prevent intrusions, assess situations with unmatched accuracy, and serve as a force multiplier in Intelligence,
- ★ This will enable commanders to operate in both conventional and sub-conventional operations in a Network Centric Environment.
- ★ Its induction will mark an extraordinary leap towards data and network centricity in the Indian Army.
- ★ SANJAY has been indigenously and jointly developed by the Indian Army and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

RANKS, INDICES & REPORTS

India Has 3rd Largest Metro Network in the World

- ★ India has the third largest operational metro rail network in the world after China and the United States of America.
- ★ In 2022, India had surpassed Japan to have the third-largest operational metro network in the world. What is noteworthy is that India has crossed the milestone of having over 1000 km of operational metro rail network.
- ★ India achieved this milestone when Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 2.8 km stretch between Janakpuri and Krishna Park of Delhi Metro Phase-IV on 5 January 2024.
- ★ The Prime Minister also inaugurated the 13 km stretch of the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Namo Bharat corridor between Sahibabad and New Ashok Nagar.
- ★ The first modern metro system was inaugurated in Delhi in 2002 and it is being operated by Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC). The initial metro network in Delhi was built with the assistance of Japan.
- ★ Now DMRC operates India's largest metro network with an operational network of 395 km.
- ★ India's first underwater metro became operational in Kolkata in March 2024 which runs under the Hooghly river.

Henley Passport Index 2025

- ★ According to the recently released Henley Passport Index 2025, India has slipped to 85th rank from 80th last year, in the world's most powerful passports list.
- ★ Singapore retained its status as the most powerful passport in the world. The United States passport rank declined from 7th in 2024 to 9th in 2025.
- ★ Afghanistan retained its status as the worst passport in the world.

- ★ The United Kingdom-based Henley and Partners firm releases the Henley Passport Index.
- ★ The Henley Passport Index is based on the data provided by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).
- ★ A country's passport strength is ranked based on the number of countries that permit visa-free travel to its citizens.
- ★ That country's passport is considered the strongest whose citizens can visit a maximum of countries visa-free.
- ★ The citizens of a country who can visit visa-free the fewest countries will be ranked at the bottom.
- ★ The index includes 199 country's passports and 227 travel destinations worldwide.
- ★ India shares the 85th rank with the African countries of Equatorial Guinea and Niger.

Global Firepower Index 2025

- ★ India has been ranked as having the 4th most powerful military in the world after the United States of America, Russia and China by the Global Firepower Index 2025.
- ★ Bhutan was ranked at the bottom of the index at 145th position. Pakistan which was ranked 9th in 2024 dropped to 12th position in the 2025 ranking.
- ★ There has been no change in the ranking of the top four countries in the world as compared to 2024 Global Firepower Index.
- ★ The Global Firepower Index has been released by a website Globalfirepower.com annually since 2006.
- ★ India was ranked at the 4th position with a score of 0.1184. A score of 0.0000 is an ideal score which denotes perfect military strength which no country possesses.
- ★ The top ranked country, the United States of America, got a score of 0.0744.
- ★ India was ranked number 1 in the world in the Population Reaching Military age annually.
- ★ India was ranked second in the world in population, available manpower, vehicles, roadways etc.
- ★ India secured poor rank in oil consumption, natural gas consumption, coal consumption, external borders and external debts.
- ★ India was ranked 145th in the world in terms of Helicopter Carrier strength and Mine warfare capability in sea.

Fiscal Health Index of the NITI Aayog

- ★ Odisha has topped the inaugural edition of the NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2025.
- ★ The report compiled by the NITI Aayog was released in New Delhi on 24 January 2025 by the Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission, Dr. Arvind Panagariya.
- ★ The NITI Aayog report assesses the fiscal health of 18 major states of India as per the 2022-23 fiscal year, identifies areas for improvement, and promotes best practices across these states.
- ★ The report objectively evaluates each state's fiscal health through a composite index facilitating comparison and benchmarking against best practices.

- ★ The Fiscal Health index includes five major sub-indices Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilisation, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability.
- ★ The Fiscal Health Index segregated the 18 states into four groups of Achiever, Frontrunner, Performer, and Aspirational on the basis of their performance in 2022-23.
 - Achiever States (1-5 rank): Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Jharkhand and Gujarat
 - Frontrunner (6-10 rank): Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka.
 - Performer (11-14 rank): Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Bihar, Haryana
 - Aspirational (15-18 rank): Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab.

AWARDS & PRIZES

2024 Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Awardees Recognized for Exceptional Sporting Achievements

- ★ The Indian Government has announced the recipients of the prestigious Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award for 2024, honouring athletes who have made exceptional contributions to sports in the country.
- ★ This esteemed award recognizes outstanding performances and achievements in various disciplines.
- ★ Manu Bhaker (Shooting):
 - She made history at the Paris 2024 Olympics by becoming the first Indian athlete post-Independence to win two medals in a single edition of the Games.
- ★ Harmanpreet Singh (Hockey):
 - As the captain of the Indian men's hockey team, led them to a second consecutive Olympic bronze medal in Paris.
 - His leadership and skills have been instrumental in India's consistent performance on the international stage.
- ★ Praveen Kumar (Para Athletics):
 - He clinched gold at the Paris Paralympics in the men's high jump T64 category, setting a new Asian record.
 - His achievement has played a key role in elevating India's position in para-athletics.
- ★ D. Gukesh (Chess):
 - Emerged as a formidable force in the world of chess, achieving significant milestones and contributing to India's rising stature in global chess.

Ministry of Defence designates 2025 as the 'Year of Reforms'

- ★ The Ministry of Defence has declared 2025 as the "Year of Reforms" to modernize India's armed forces and prepare them for future challenges.

- ★ Reforms will enhance Jointness and Integration initiatives, aiming for the establishment of Integrated Theatre Commands.
- ★ The reforms will prioritize new domains like Cyber and Space, as well as emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Hypersonics, and Robotics.
- ★ The development of associated Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs) will be essential to win future wars.
- ★ The overall aim is to build a more capable, technologically advanced, and integrated military force by 2025.

US Presidential Medal of Freedom

- ★ Captain of Argentina men's football team Lionel Messi was among the 19 people to be honored with the United States of America's highest civilian award 'The Presidential Medal of Freedom' in a ceremony at the White House on 5 January 2025.
- ★ Messi became the first men's football player and the second from the sport after female football player Megan Rapinoe, who won it in 2022.
- ★ Presently Messi is playing for the Inter Miami football club in the Major League of the United States of America.
- ★ The award was conferred to the 19 distinguished persons by the American President Joe Biden whose term as the 46th President of the United States ends on 19 January 2025.
- ★ The US Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest civilian award of the United States of America. It is similar to the Bharat Ratna in India.

Dr. Krishna Ella Honored with INSA Fellowship for 2025

- ★ Dr. Krishna Ella, Co-founder and Executive Chairman of Bharat Biotech International, has been awarded the prestigious India Fellowship of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) for 2025.
- ★ This recognition celebrates his outstanding contributions to vaccine development, biotechnology, and advancements in public health.
- ★ The award was honored for contributions to new knowledge, vaccine technologies, and improvements in existing systems.
- ★ Ella was recognized for pioneering vaccine development, making India a leader in global vaccine innovation.
- ★ Ella was also credited with advancing the biotechnology ecosystem and supporting India's self-reliance in vaccine production.
- ★ At the 90th INSA General Meeting in Chennai, Dr. Ella addressed the theme of "Science in Translation", emphasizing the need to bridge research and practical applications.

Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam awarded Tarun Das the Honorary Citizen Award

- ★ Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam presented the Honorary Citizen Award to Tarun Das in New Delhi.

- ★ The Honorary Citizen Award is the highest recognition granted by the Singapore Government to a non-Singaporean.
- ★ This prestigious award is presented to individuals who have made notable contributions in various fields such as business, science and technology, education, health, arts and culture, and community service.
- ★ Tarun Das, former head of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), was honored for his exceptional role in strengthening the bilateral relations between India and Singapore.
- ★ Das has been instrumental in promoting India-Singapore co-operation, serving as a key advocate for Singapore in India.
- ★ His continuous efforts have solidified his reputation as one of Singapore's strongest advocates in India, emphasizing his long-standing role in building connections between the two countries.

Professor Urbasi Sinha Awarded Gates-Cambridge Impact Prize 2025

- ★ Professor Urbasi Sinha, a distinguished faculty member at the Raman Research Institute (RRI) in the Light and Matter Physics theme, has been honored with the Gates-Cambridge Impact Prize 2025 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Cambridge, UK.
- ★ Professor Sinha has spearheaded groundbreaking advancements in quantum communication, computing, and optics.
- ★ Under her leadership, her lab was among the first in India to develop and utilize heralded and entangled photon sources, marking a significant milestone in India's quantum research.
- ★ As a key figure in India's National Quantum Mission, Professor Sinha plays a vital role in driving the country's ambitions to lead in quantum technologies.
- ★ Her efforts are aligned with India's strategic objectives to enhance technological competitiveness in the quantum space.

INCOIS Gets Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2025

- ★ The Hyderabad-based Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) has been selected for the 2025 Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar in the Institutional category. No individual has been chosen for the award in 2025.
- ★ The Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar is announced by the Government of India on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on 23 January every year.
- ★ The theme of the 2025 Parakram Diwas was "Netaji: Courage, Determination and Patriotism".
- ★ The Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar was instituted by the Government of India in 2019.
- ★ The award is administered by the Disaster Management Division of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.
- ★ The awards are given in the Individual and Institutional categories to an Indian citizen or institution.
- ★ The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) is an autonomous body under the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences.

- ★ It was established in 1999 in Hyderabad, Telangana.

Indore and Udaipur Achieve Global Recognition as Wetland Cities under Ramsar Convention

- ★ Indore and Udaipur have reached a significant milestone by becoming the first two Indian cities to be recognized under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as Wetland Cities.
- ★ This prestigious recognition is a testament to India's ongoing commitment to sustainable urban development and ecological conservation.
- ★ The accreditation highlights the role of wetlands in providing ecological, social, and economic benefits, making them crucial to the sustainable growth of cities.
- ★ Indore and Udaipur are the first cities from India to be recognized as Wetland Cities under the Ramsar Convention.
- ★ The Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) nominated both cities for the prestigious recognition.
- ★ The WCA system promotes the conservation and wise use of urban and peri-urban wetlands.
- ★ It provides an opportunity for cities to gain international recognition and positive publicity for their efforts in protecting wetland ecosystems.
- ★ Home to Sirpur Lake, a Ramsar site that is notable for its role as a water bird congregation area and is being developed into a bird sanctuary.

Shri Hariman Sharma: The Apple Man of India Honored with Padma Shri

- ★ Shri Hariman Sharma, a pioneering farmer from Himachal Pradesh, has been awarded the prestigious Padma Shri (2025) for his revolutionary contributions to Indian agriculture.
- ★ Known as the Apple Man of India, Shri Sharma developed the HRMN-99 apple variety, transforming apple farming by enabling cultivation in tropical and subtropical regions.
- ★ He pursued education up to matriculation and developed a passion for farming and pomology.
- ★ He overcame numerous challenges to innovate and contribute significantly to agriculture.

Doordarshan Honored for Electoral Campaigns on Voter Awareness

- ★ Doordarshan, India's national broadcaster, has been recognized with an award in the Electronic Media category for its exemplary Voter Awareness and Education Campaign during the Lok Sabha Elections 2024.
- ★ The campaign, highlighted by the impactful series "Chunav Ka Parv Desh Ka Garv", played a pivotal role in fostering an informed and active citizenry.
- ★ President Droupadi Murmu presented the award to Doordarshan's Director-General Kanchan Prasad during the Republic Day 2025.

Indian Banks' Association Banking Technology Awards

- ★ Karnataka Bank won 6 prestigious awards at the 20th Annual Banking Technology Conference, Expo and Citations, 2024, organized by the Indian Banks' Association.
- ★ **Best Tech Talent and Organisation – Runner Up**
 - Karnataka Bank fosters a digital-first culture with ongoing training, partnerships with industry experts, and innovative tools to improve team collaboration and accelerate development.
- ★ **Best IT Risk Management – Runner Up**
 - The bank has implemented robust security frameworks and proactive risk monitoring, incorporating technologies like AI & ML for predictive risk analytics.
- ★ **Best Technology Bank – Runner Up**
 - Karnataka Bank has built a strong enterprise architecture team, leveraging technologies like cloud computing and AI/ML models for superior customer experiences.
- ★ **Best Fintech and DPI Adoption – Runner Up**
 - The bank leads in FinTech innovation and DPI adoption, with initiatives like CBDC and UPI/IMPS, boasting minimal failure rates.
- ★ **Best Digital Sales, Payments & Engagement – Special Mention**
 - Karnataka Bank drives digital sales, payments, and engagement using AI/ML, ensuring seamless transactions and personalized customer experiences.
- ★ **Best AI and ML Adoption – Special Mention**
 - The bank excels in adopting AI/ML technologies with phone banking, chatbots, and personalized banking to enhance customer engagement.

State Tableaux Award of Republic Day Parade 2025

- ★ The Union Ministry of Defence has announced the winners of the best Marching Contingents and Tableaux of the Republic Day Parade 2025.
- ★ Uttar Pradesh's tableau, titled 'Maha Kumbh 2025 – Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas', has claimed the first place in the People's Choice Award category, securing 40% of the votes (25,007).
- ★ This recognition celebrates the state's stunning portrayal of the Maha
- ★ The tableau showcased the grandeur of the Maha Kumbh, an event recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.
- ★ It highlighted the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers at Prayagraj, the site of the world's largest gathering of humanity.
- ★ Tripura and Andhra Pradesh came second and third position respectively with the theme of 'Eternal Reverence: The worship of 14 Deities in Tripura - Kharchi Puja' and 'Etikoppaka Bommalu – Eco-Friendly Wooden Toys'.
- ★ The Republic Day functions are organised by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, in which there is an impressive march past by the Armed Forces/Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) and the other police forces.

Maharaja Hari Singh Award

- ★ Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha was conferred with the prestigious Maharaja Hari Singh Award at a grand ceremony held at Satyam Resort, Jammu.
- ★ This award, organized by the Gulistan News Network, was part of the 'Maharaja Hari Singh Peace and Harmony Award 2024-25'
- ★ The award recognized LG Sinha's contributions to reforms and planning in Jammu and Kashmir.
- ★ LG Sinha stressed the importance of ensuring inclusive development across all segments of society, focusing on women empowerment and the welfare of marginalized sections.
- ★ He urged citizens to actively contribute to the country's development as India strives to become a developed nation by 2047.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

K.N. Renuka Pujar Appointed as Karnataka University's First Transgender Woman Guest Lecturer

- ★ K.N. Renuka Pujar has become the first transgender person to be appointed as a guest lecturer at a university in Karnataka, specifically Vijayanagara Sri Krishnadevaraya University.
- ★ Pujar, aged 27, completed her post-graduation in Kannada, qualifying her for the guest lecturer position.
- ★ Out of 30 applicants, Pujar was selected based on her qualifications, good marks, and performance in the lecture, as per the selection committee's assessment.
- ★ Pujar credited her achievement to the strong support of her parents, highlighting their role in her success.
- ★ She joined the Kannada Department at the Nandihalli campus (PG Centre) of Vijayanagara Sri Krishnadevaraya University earlier this month.

CEO of the UIDAI

- ★ 1995 batch IAS Officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre, Bhuvnesh Kumar has taken over as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) on 2 January 2025.
- ★ He replaces Amit Aggarwal who has been appointed as the Secretary, of the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, Government of India.
- ★ Bhuvnesh Kumar apart from being the CEO of the UIDAI will also be the Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India.
- ★ Bhuvnesh Kumar has held several important posts in the Uttar Pradesh Government. He was Principal Secretary in the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries.
- ★ The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) was set up in 2009 by the Central Government under the Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog).

Manish Singhal Named Secretary General of ASSOCHAM

- ★ Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) announced the appointment of industry expert Manish Singhal as its new Secretary General.
- ★ Singhal takes over from Deepak Sood, who successfully led the organization for the past five years and has now stepped down to pursue other opportunities.
- ★ Singhal previously served as the Deputy Secretary General at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and has extensive experience working with global companies, including Tata Motors, Eicher (Volvo), Tata AutoComp Systems, Moser Baer India, and BEML, among others.

Governor of Odisha and Manipur

- ★ Hari Babu Kambhampati was sworn in as the 27th Governor of Odisha at a ceremony held at the Raj Bhavan.
- ★ Orissa High Court Chief Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh administered the oath of office.
- ★ Kambhampati succeeded Raghubar Das, who resigned from the position.
- ★ Kambhampati, a former Governor of Mizoram, was appointed as the Governor of Odisha by President Droupadi Murmu on December 24, 2024.
- ★ Ajay Kumar Bhalla, former Union Home Secretary, was sworn in as the 19th Governor of Manipur during a function at the Raj Bhavan in Imphal.
- ★ Bhalla was administered the oath by Manipur High Court Chief Justice D Krishnakumar.
- ★ Bhalla has the distinction of being the longest-serving Union Home Secretary, completing his five-year tenure in August 2024.
- ★ Bhalla succeeded Lakshman Prasad Acharya as Governor of Manipur.

Director General of Directorate General of Civil Aviation

- ★ Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, an IAS Officer from the Madhya Pradesh cadre, has been appointed as the Director General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
- ★ He succeeds C. Sharma, who is retiring at the end of the month.
- ★ Kidwai was previously the Additional Secretary in the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.
- ★ The position was previously held by Sharma as an additional charge along with his role as Joint Director General at DGCA.

Chairman of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) Additional Secretary Appointments

- ★ Ashutosh Agnihotri, an IAS Officer, has been appointed as the Chairman and Managing Director of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary to the Government of India.
- ★ Agnihotri was serving as the Additional Secretary in the Department of Home, Ministry of Home Affairs.

- ★ Akash Tripathi, a 1998 batch IAS Officer of the Madhya Pradesh cadre, has been appointed as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Power.
- ★ Kamal Kishore Soan has been appointed as Additional Secretary and Mission Director for the Jal Jeevan Mission under the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (previously Additional Secretary in the Labour Ministry).
- ★ Shubha Thakur has been appointed as Additional Secretary in the Inter State Council Secretariat under the Home Ministry (formerly Additional Secretary in the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare).

Chief Financial Officer of Apple

- ★ Indian-origin Executive Kevan Parekh has assumed the role of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of Apple, effective January 1, 2025.
- ★ Parekh replaces Luca Maestri, who had been Apple's CFO since 2014.
- ★ As CFO, Parekh will oversee key functions at Apple, including accounting, business support, financial planning and analysis, treasury, investor relations, internal audit, and tax functions.
- ★ Parekh has been with Apple since 2013, contributing to the company's financial and business planning, as well as product development.
- ★ Prior to becoming CFO, Parekh served as Apple's Vice President of Financial Planning and Analysis and Vice President of Worldwide Finance.
- ★ He worked across various functions, including engineering, iTunes, marketing, retail, and sales.

11th Chairman of ISRO and Secretary of DOS

- ★ The Government of India has appointed a senior Indian Space Organisation (ISRO) scientist V. Narayanan as the 11th Chairman of ISRO and Chairman of the Department of Space (DOS).
- ★ He will succeed the current Chairman S. Somanth and assume office on 14 January 2025.
- ★ The name of V. Narayanan was approved by the apex Appointments Committee of the Cabinet in a meeting held on 7 January 2025 in New Delhi.
- ★ The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and attended by the Union Minister for Home Affairs and of Co-operation, Amit Shah.
- ★ V. Narayanan has been appointed for a term of two years with effect from 14 January 2025, or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- ★ V. Narayanan is a distinguished scientist and is an expert in Rocket and Space spacecraft propulsion. He joined ISRO in 1984 and later became the Director of the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC).

President of Athletics Federation of India

- ★ Bahadur Singh Sagoo has been unanimously elected as the new President of the Athletics Federation of India on 7 January 2025.
- ★ Bahadur Singh Sagoo will replace Adille Sumariwalla who has been the President of the Athletics Federation of India since 2012.

- ★ The general body of the Athletics Federation of India elected its new Officer Bearers – President, Secretary General and Treasurer in the meeting held in Chandigarh on 6 and 7 January 2025.
- ★ Niels Lindholm of World Athletics was the observer at the election and participated virtually in the whole process.
- ★ The newly elected office bearer of the Athletics Federation of India as follows;
 - President: Bahadur Singh Sagoo
 - Secretary General: Sandeep Mehta
 - Treasurer: BE Stanley Jones
- ★ The term of the newly elected President, Secretary General and the Treasurer is four years (2025-2029).

State Bank of India Names Baldev Prakash as Group Chief Risk Officer

- ★ Baldev Prakash has been appointed as the Deputy Managing Director and Group Chief Risk Officer at State Bank of India (SBI).
- ★ This follows his successful three-year tenure as the Managing Director and CEO of Jammu and Kashmir Bank (up until December).
- ★ In addition to Prakash's appointment, Shiva Om Dikshit has been assigned the role of Deputy Managing Director, Operations-Channel Management at SBI.
- ★ These leadership changes aim to further strengthen SBI's top management team.
- ★ Prakash brings over 30 years of banking experience, having worked across various roles in both small and large SBI branches.

Chairperson of PM Museum and Library Society

- ★ The Government of India has reconstituted the Executive Council of the Prime Ministers Museum and Library Society and reappointed Nripendra Mishra as the Chairperson of the Executive Council of the Society.
- ★ The Executive Council is the highest decision-making body of the Prime Ministers Museum and Library Society.
- ★ The Prime Minister is the ex-officio President of the Prime Ministers Museum and Library Society and the Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is currently the Vice-Chairman.
- ★ The Prime Minister Museum and Library Society was set up by the Government of India on 1st April 1966 to manage the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library which is now known as the Prime Minister Museum and Library.

Secretary General of Indian Ocean Rim Association

- ★ Sanjiv Ranjan, a senior Indian Foreign Service (IFS) Officer from the 1993 batch, has been appointed as the next Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
- ★ IORA is a regional organisation that promotes economic co-operation, sustainable development, and regional security among countries bordering the Indian Ocean.

- ★ It was established in 1997 as an intergovernmental organisation for the states on the rim of the Indian Ocean.
- ★ The organisation has 23 member states, including countries such as India, Australia, Indonesia, and South Africa.
- ★ IORA is supported by 12 dialogue partners, such as China, the European Union, and the United States.

Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force

- ★ The Centre has appointed Gyanendra Pratap Singh as the Director General of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), according to a Personnel Ministry order issued on January 18, 2025.
- ★ Singh, a 1991-batch IPS Officer from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, was serving as the Director General of Police (DGP) of Assam before his new appointment.
- ★ Singh will serve in this role until his superannuation on November 30, 2027, or until further orders.
- ★ Singh will take charge from Vitul Kumar, the Special DG of CRPF, who had been officiating as the DG since December 30, 2024, after the retirement of the previous Force Chief, Anish Dayal Singh.
- ★ Singh has had a distinguished career, having worked with the Special Protection Group (SPG) and serving on central deputation with the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as Inspector General.

Dhananjay Shukla Elected as President of ICSI

- ★ The Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI) has elected its new office bearers for 2025.
- ★ Company Secretary (CS) Dhananjay Shukla has been elected as the President and CS Pawan G Chandak has been elected as the Vice-President of the ICSI.
- ★ Dhananjay Shukla was the Vice-President of the ICSI for 2024. CS Dhananjay Shukla is a Commerce and Law graduate and is also a Fellow Member of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI).
- ★ He is a practicing Company Secretary and has expertise in the areas of Corporate Law, Securities Law, and Taxation.
- ★ CS Dhananjay Shukla has been serving the ICSI in different capacities for many years.
- ★ The newly elected Vice-President of ICSI Pawan G Chandak is a qualified Company Secretary with a specialization in Labour Laws and Labour Welfare. He has varied experience in the fields of Corporate Law, Foreign Exchange Law, Industrial Law, Legal Metrology, Secretarial Audits, Arbitration matters, etc.
- ★ He has worked with large corporate houses and multinational corporations (MNCs).

Reserve Bank of India Forms New Committee for Bank License

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reconstituted the Standing External Advisory Committee (SEAC) to evaluate applications for universal banks and small finance banks.

- ★ The 5-member panel will be chaired by MK Jain, Former Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.
- ★ As per licensing guidelines, applications for universal banks and small finance banks are initially screened by the RBI to ensure prima facie eligibility of the applicants.
- ★ Thereafter, SEAC, comprising eminent persons with experience in banking, the financial sector, and other relevant areas, evaluates the applications.
- ★ The other members of the panel are Revathy Iyer (Director, Central Board, RBI), Parvathy V Sundaram (former Executive Director, RBI), Hemant G Contractor (former MD, SBI, and former Chairman, PFRDA) and N S Kannan (former MD & CEO, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Co).
- ★ The tenure of the panel will be for 3 years, the RBI stated while announcing the names of the members of the SEAC.
- ★ The secretarial support to the committee would be provided by the Department of Regulation, RBI.

Prime Minister of Ireland

- ★ Micheal Martin became the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland for the second time.
- ★ He was previously the Prime Minister of Ireland from 2020 to 2022.
- ★ Ireland is a parliamentary democracy where the Executive power is vested in the cabinet led by the Prime Minister.
- ★ The Prime Minister is responsible to the lower house of the Parliament and shall have a majority in the house.
- ★ The Parliament of Ireland is known as Oireachtas and it is bicameral. The upper house of the Parliament is called Éireann (Senate) and the lower house is called Dail.
- ★ The 174 members of the Dail are directly elected by the people for a term of five years.

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer IDBI Bank

- ★ IDBI Bank has announced the reappointment of Rakesh Sharma as Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for another three-year term.
- ★ The decision, approved by the Board of Directors on January 23, 2025, will be effective from March 19, 2025, after receiving the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) approval.
- ★ Rakesh Sharma, a seasoned banking professional with over 40 years of experience, began his career at State Bank of India (SBI), where he held key roles in credit assignments, international banking operations, HR, and retail operations across multiple regions.
- ★ He also served as Head of the Mid Corporate Group in Andhra Pradesh and as Chief General Manager in Bihar and Jharkhand.
- ★ In his leadership roles, Rakesh Sharma was MD and CEO of Lakshmi Vilas Bank Ltd. from 2014 to 2015 and Canara Bank from 2015 to 2018.
- ★ At Canara Bank, he also chaired the bank's group companies.

Jitender Pal Singh Appointed India's New Envoy to Israel

- ★ Jitender Pal Singh, who has served as India's point person for engaging with the Taliban since their capture of power in Afghanistan in August 2021, has been appointed as India's new Ambassador to Israel.
- ★ This appointment comes at a crucial time when diplomatic efforts are ongoing to resolve the Middle East crisis, particularly the hostages and ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas.
- ★ A 2002-batch Indian Foreign Service (IFS) Officer, Singh is currently serving as Joint Secretary in charge of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.
- ★ He has also worked closely with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's office.
- ★ In the past four years, Singh has had extensive engagement with the Taliban, including multiple visits to Afghanistan where he met prominent Taliban officials such as Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoob.
- ★ Additionally, he has met with former Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai. His groundwork played a role in facilitating the recent meeting between Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Taliban Foreign Minister Muttaqi in Dubai.

President of Belarus

- ★ Alexander Lukashenko has been reelected President of Belarus, securing a 7th five-year term.
- ★ According to preliminary results from the Central Election Commission cited by the state news agency Belta, Lukashenko won 86.82% of the vote in the presidential election held on January 26, 2025.
- ★ His closest rival, Sergei Syrankov, received 3.21%, followed by Oleg Gaidukevich with 2.02%, Anna Kanopatskaya with 1.86%, and Alexander Khizhnyak with 1.74%.
- ★ Under Belarusian law, a candidate must secure over 50% of the vote to win the presidency.
- ★ Lukashenko has been in office since 1994, when he won Belarus's first presidential election.

Sridhar Vembu Steps Down as Chief Executive Officer of Zoho Corporation

- ★ Sridhar Vembu, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Zoho Corp, will step down from his role as CEO and take on a new position as Chief Scientist.
- ★ In this role, he will focus on deep R&D initiatives.
- ★ Shailesh Kumar Davey, another co-founder, will take over as the new Group CEO of Zoho Corp.
- ★ Vembu stated that the decision was driven by the rapid developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and his desire to focus on R&D and his rural development mission.
- ★ Vembu believes the future of the company depends on how well it navigates the AI challenge.
- ★ Vembu acknowledged that AI is a huge opportunity and challenge for tech companies.
- ★ He emphasized the importance of reinventing the company to adapt to the AI era.

Bank of America Appoints Mandar Donde as Head of India Investment Banking

- ★ Mandar Donde, currently Head of Asia-Pacific TMT Investment Banking at BofA Securities, will take over as the new Head of Global Corporate and Investment Banking in India starting April 1, 2025.
- ★ Raj Balakrishnan, the current co-head of India Investment Banking at BofA Securities, will assume the role of Vice-Chairman, Global Corporate and Investment Banking, India.
- ★ Donde, with over 24 years of experience at BofA, will relocate from Singapore to India as part of the reshuffle.
- ★ Balakrishnan, who has also spent above 24 years at the firm, transitions after co-heading the division for 12 years.

SPORTS

33rd Santosh Trophy Title

- ★ The most successful team in the history of the Santosh Trophy, West Bengal added one more to its collection by defeating Kerala in the final of the 78th edition of the Santosh Trophy.
- ★ It was the 33rd Santosh Trophy for the Bengal team.
- ★ The final of the 78th edition of the Santosh Trophy 2024-25 was played at the GMC Balayogi Stadium in Hyderabad, Telangana on 31st December 2024.
- ★ Santosh Trophy is a premier domestic state-level football tournament for men in India organised by the All-India Football Federation.
- ★ Peter Thangaraj Player of the Championship - Robi Hansda of West Bengal.
- ★ Tulsidas Balaram Player of the Final Match - Robi Hansda of West Bengal.

2024 FIDE World Rapid Championship

- ★ Koneru Humpy of India and the Russian Volodar Murzin respectively won the women's and Open titles at the 2024 FIDE World Rapid Championships.
- ★ It was the second FIDE World Rapid Championship for Humpy while the Russian Volodar Muzrin became the second-youngest player to win the Championship in the Open section.
- ★ The 2024 FIDE World Rapid Championship was held in New York City, the United States of America 26-29 December 2024.
- ★ The 2024 FIDE World Blitz Championship will be held at the same venue on 30 and 31 December 2024.
- ★ The World Chess Championship is held in Classical, Rapid, and Blitz format.
- ★ 37-year-old Grandmaster Koneru Humpy, despite losing her first game in the championships emerged as the winner with her second World Rapid Championship title with a score of 8.5 in the 11 rounds.

World Blitz Championship Women's section

- ★ R. Vaishali of India won the bronze medal in the women's section of the 2024 FIDE World Blitz Championships, adding to the gold won by Koneru Humpy in the 2024 World Rapid Championship.
- ★ For the time in the history of the World Blitz Championship, the title of the Open section was shared between two players- Magnus Carlsen and Ian Nepomniachtchi. It was the seventh title for Magnus Carlsen while the first for Ian Nepomniachtchi.
- ★ The women's section was won by Chinese chess player Ju Wenjun.
- ★ The 2024 FIDE World Blitz Championship was held in New York City, the United States of America on 30 and 31 December 2024.
- ★ R. Vaishali won the bronze medal in the women's section of the 2024 FIDE World Blitz Championship. In the quarterfinal, she defeated Zhu Jiner of China but lost to the eventual winner Ju Wenjun in the semifinal.

World Darts Champion

- ★ Luke Littler, 17, became the youngest-ever World Darts Champion after defeating Michael van Gerwen 7-3 in the final at Alexandra Palace, London.
- ★ **Dominant Performance:**
 - Littler surged to a 4-0 lead early in the match, showing composure and skill, even as van Gerwen mounted a brief comeback.
 - Littler's precision with double 10 and double top applied relentless pressure on the three-time champion.
 - Littler's victory earned him a £500,000 prize, marking a significant achievement in his career at such a young age.

17 British Junior Open 2025 Squash Tournament

- ★ Indian Squash prodigy Anahat Singh defeated Egypt's Malika Elkaraksy to win the women's Under 17 British Junior Open 2025 Squash tournament in Birmingham, England.
- ★ In the 2025 edition, the top-seeded Anahat Singh defeated Malika Elkaraksy of Egypt 3-2 (4-11, 11-9, 6-11, 11-5, 11-3).
- ★ The 2025 edition of the British Junior Open was held in Birmingham, England from 2-6 January 2025.
- ★ The competition was held for both boys and girls in the five age categories of Under 11, Under 13, Under 15, Under 17, and Under 19 age groups.

Karnataka Won Vijay Hazare Trophy

- ★ Karnataka men's senior cricket team won its 5th Vijay Hazare Trophy by defeating Vidarbha in the final by 36 runs.
- ★ The final of the 2024-25 Vijay Hazare Trophy was played at the Kotambi Stadium in Vadodara, Gujarat. The win at Vadodara also ended the five-year title drought for Karnataka in domestic cricket.

- ★ Vijay Hazare Trophy is organised by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).
- ★ The victory over Vidharbha in Vadodara was the overall 5th title for the Karnataka team in the Vijay Hazare tournament.
- ★ Karnataka had previously won the title in 2013-14, 2014-15, 2017-18 and 2019-20 season.
 - Player of the Final: Ravichandran Smaran of Karnataka
 - Player of the Tournament: Karun Nair of Vidarbha

India Clinches Double Gold at Inaugural Kho Kho World Cup 2025

- ★ India made history by winning both the men's and women's titles at the first-ever Kho Kho World Cup 2025, held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium.
- ★ The Indian teams triumphed over Nepal with commanding victories: the men's team won 54-36, and the women's team dominated 78-40.
- ★ Captain Priyanka Ingle led the Indian women's team with exceptional strategy and synchronization.
- ★ England is likely to host the 2027 Kho Kho World Cup, as announced by men's Coach Ashwini Kumar.
- ★ Both captains and coaches emphasized the significance of this victory in promoting kho kho as a global sport.

India Set to Host FIDE Chess World Cup 2025

- ★ India to Host FIDE Chess World Cup 2025: The tournament, a major chess event, is scheduled to take place from October 31 to November 27, 2025.
- ★ The top three players from the World Cup will secure spots in the prestigious Candidates Chess Tournament, where they will compete for the opportunity to challenge World Champion D. Gukesh.
- ★ This tournament serves as a crucial qualifier for the Candidates Tournament, which determines the next challenger for the World Chess Championship.
- ★ In addition to the open World Cup, FIDE will also host the Women's World Cup 2025 in Batumi, Georgia, in July 2025.

Indian Open Badminton

- ★ 2024 Paris Olympic gold medal winner Denmark's Viktor Axelsen and South Korea's An Se-young respectively won the men's and women's singles title of the 2025 India Open Badminton Tournament.
- ★ The Indian Open Badminton Tournament was held in New Delhi.
- ★ Viktor Axelsen who was appearing in the final of the Indian Open for the sixth time in the last 10 years defeated Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong China 21-16, 21-8 to win his third India Open Title.
- ★ Paris Olympic gold medal winner An Se-young of South Korea had little trouble in defeating Pornpawee Chochuwong of Thailand in the final by 21-12, 21-9 in just 39 minutes.

- ★ In the men's doubles the Malaysian pair of Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin defeated the South Korean pair of Kim Won-ho and Seo Seung-jae 21-15, 13-21, 21-16 to win the men's doubles title.
- ★ In the women's doubles, the Japanese duo of Arisa Igarashi and Ayaka Sakuramoto defeated the South Korean pair of Kim Hye-jeong and Kong Hee-yong 21-15, 21-13 to win the women's doubles title.
- ★ The mixed doubles title was won by the Jiang Zhenbang and Wei Yaxin pair of China by defeating Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue of France by 21-18, 21-17 in the final.

Australian Cricket Hall of Fame

- ★ Michael Clarke, former Australian cricket captain, has been inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame, becoming its 64th member.
- ★ This honor highlights his remarkable contributions to Australian cricket through record-breaking performances and dynamic leadership.
- ★ He represented New South Wales, Australia, at the age of 17.
- ★ He made a spectacular entry into Test cricket during the 2004 India tour, scoring 151 runs in Bengaluru.
- ★ He played 115 Test matches and 245 ODIs, solidifying his place as one of Australia's greatest middle-order batsmen.

Women's Hockey India League 2025

- ★ The Odisha Warriors Club won the inaugural edition of the Women's Hockey India League 2024-25 title by defeating Soorma Hockey Club 2-1 in the final played at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Astro Turf Hockey Stadium in Ranchi.
- ★ The Women's Hockey India League is a franchise club tournament based on the Cricket's Indian Premier League (IPL) model.
- ★ In the inaugural Women's Hockey India League four franchise teams- Soorma Hockey Club, Delhi SG Pipers, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers, and Odisha Warriors- participated.
- ★ Each franchise team had a maximum of 24-player squad, which included at least 16 Indian hockey players (with a mandatory four junior players) and eight international hockey players.
 - Best Goalkeeper: Savita Punia (Soorma Hockey Club)
 - Upcoming Player: Sonam (Soorma Hockey Club)
 - Top Scorers: Yibbi Jansen (Odisha Warriors), Charlotte Englebert (Soorma Hockey Club)
 - Player of the Tournament: Jyoti (Soorma Hockey Club)

2025 National TT Championship Singles Title

- ★ Manush Shah and Diya Chitale of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) respectively won the men's and women's singles titles at the UTT 86th Senior National and Inter-State Table Tennis Championships 2025 held at the Pandit Dindayal Upadhyay Indoor Stadium in Surat Gujarat.

- ★ The UTT 86th Senior National and Inter-State Table Tennis Championships 2025 was organised by the Table Tennis Federation of India at Surat from 19-26 January 2025.
- ★ Manush Shah (RBI) defeated Payas Jain (Delhi) 10-12, 11-6, 11-6, 12-10, 11-8.
- ★ In the women's final, Diya Chitale defeated two-time national champion and highest-ranked Indian women's player in the world, Sreeja Akula. Sreeja Akula was representing RBI in the Championships.
- ★ Diya defeated Sreeja Akula 4-3 (10-12, 8-11, 13-11, 12-10, 11-8, 9-11, 11-9) in the final to win the singles title.
- ★ In the mixed doubles, the Railways Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) pair of Poymantee Baisya and Akash Pal defeated Maharashtra's Jash Modi and Taneesha Kotecha 11-5, 11-6, 11-4.

Johor International Open Chess Tournament

- ★ Iniyan Panneerselvam, the talented 22-year-old Grandmaster from Erode, Tamil Nadu, delivered a remarkable performance to claim victory at the 9th Johor International Open Chess Tournament held in Malaysia.
- ★ Iniyan dominated the event, finishing 1.5 points ahead of his nearest competitor and securing the title before the final round.
- ★ This victory, combined with his earlier success at the Chennai Open in January 2025, further solidifies his position as one of India's rising chess stars.
- ★ Iniyan gained 15 rating points from this tournament, further boosting his chess ranking.

ICC Cricketer and Test Player of the Year Award

- ★ Indian men's cricket Test team vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah has been honoured with the 2024 Sir Garfield Sobers Award for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year Award and the ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year Award.
- ★ Fellow Indian pace bowler Arshdeep Singh was selected for the ICC Men's T20 International Cricketer of the Year Award and Smriti Mandhana was chosen for the ICC Women's ODI (One Day International) Cricketer of the Year Award.
- ★ The annual ICC Awards was announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) at its headquarters in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- ★ ICC awards honours 12 individuals for their performance in all three formats of Test, One Day Internationals (ODI) and T20 Internationals (T20I).
- ★ The performance of the men and women players and umpires during the 2024 cricketing season has been taken into account while selecting the players for the ICC Awards.
- ★ Jasprit Bumrah became the fifth Indian cricketer after Rahul Dravid (2004), Sachin Tendulkar (2010), Ravichandran Ashwin (2016) and Virat Kohli (2017, 2018) to receive the Sir Garfield Sobers Award for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year Award.
- ★ Jasprit Bumrah was the highest wicket-taker in Test matches in 2024. He picked 71 wickets with an average of 14.92 in 13 test matches.
- ★ Women T20I Cricketer of the Year: Melie Kerr of New Zealand.

- ★ Men T20I Cricketer of the Year: Arshdeep Singh of India.
- ★ Emerging Women Cricketer of the Year Award: Annerie Dercksen (All-rounder) of South Africa.
- ★ Emerging Men Cricketer of the Year Award: Kamindu Mendis (batsman) of Sri Lanka.
- ★ Women's Associate Cricketer of the Year: Esha Oza, Captain of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Women's team.
- ★ Men's Associate Cricketer of the Year: Gerhard Erasmus, Captain of Namibian men's cricket team.
- ★ Umpire of the Year: Richard Illingworth of England.

Narendra Modi Inaugurates 38th National Games in Dehradun, Uttarakhand

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 38th Summer National Games at Dehradun, Uttarakhand.
- ★ Uttarakhand is hosting the Summer National Games for the first time and it will be held from 28 January to 14 February 2025 across 12 cities of the state.
- ★ With the theme of 'Green Games', the 38th National Games uses recyclable materials, rainwater harvesting, eco-friendly transportation systems, etc.
- ★ It aims to inspire individuals and organizations to adopt eco-friendly and sustainable practices.
- ★ The opening ceremony was held at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.
- ★ The National Games torch covered a 4000 km journey across the 13 districts of Uttarakhand.
- ★ The Opening ceremony started with a classical dance 'Tandav', which is an ode to Lord Shiva.
- ★ 2025 conches were blown to mark the opening of the Games.
- ★ The 38th Summer National Games is being organised by the Indian Olympic Association in association with the Uttarakhand Government.
- ★ Mascot of the Game: Mauli.

BOOKS & AUTHORS

Amitav Ghosh Discusses His New Book, "Wild Fictions",

- ★ Ghosh unveils his book – Wild Fictions (Essays) with Former Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, at India International Centre (IIC).
- ★ At the launch of his new book, Wild Fictions (Essays), Ghosh also delivered the CD Deshmukh Memorial lecture on the theme "Time of Monsters, Time of Possibilities: Reflections of an Interstitial Era".
- ★ In his speech, Ghosh quoted Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, emphasizing that the world was entering a "time of monsters", a period in which the old era was dying while a new one struggled to emerge.

- ★ He reflected on the past 25 years, describing them as times marked by human and environmental disasters “monsters” that had emerged in various forms.
- ★ Ghosh, known for his literary works such as *The Hungry Tide*, *The Shadow Lines*, and his non-fiction books like *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, emphasized the unprecedented challenges of the modern era.
- ★ He discussed how climate change has given rise to extreme weather events that were once considered improbable.

Pankaj Mishra's *The World After Gaza: A Reflection on Morality, Suffering, and Global Politics*

- ★ Pankaj Mishra's latest work, *The World After Gaza*, offers a poignant and deeply critical exploration of the ongoing war in the Palestinian Gaza Strip.
- ★ Mishra describes the book as an attempt to make sense of the crisis by placing it within historical context, rather than focusing purely on literary or analytical brilliance.
- ★ The book aims to document the atrocities of the conflict and address the moral and political failings of the modern world.
- ★ It serves as a reflection on the moral decay of global politics and the erosion of basic human rights.
- ★ The book was published by Juggernaut Books.

Amitabh Kant's Book: 'How India Scaled Mt. G-20'

- ★ Amitabh Kant, India's G-20 Sherpa, authored the book *'How India Scaled Mt. G-20'*, published by Rupa Publications chronicling India's achievements during its G-20 Presidency.
- ★ The book highlights India's determination and collaborative efforts in making the 2023 G-20 Summit in New Delhi a historic success.
- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the book as a commendable endeavour, providing a clear perspective on India's efforts toward human-centric development.
- ★ Amitabh Kant played a pivotal role as G-20 Sherpa, steering negotiations and diplomatic efforts during India's presidency.
- ★ The book includes a foreword by S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, emphasizing the transformative impact of the G-20 Summit.

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Day of War Orphans

- ★ World Day of War Orphans 2025 is observed on the 6th January 2025.
- ★ Children who lose their parents in sudden, violent events like war are forced to live with a surviving relative or into the foster care system, where they must deal with horrible living conditions including starvation and disease.

- ★ It's impossible to fathom the emotional and mental strain they experience.
- ★ About half of the casualties in wars over the past few centuries were civilians, a percentage that gradually rose until 2001.
- ★ According to UNICEF, there were "almost 140 million orphans worldwide" as of 2015.
- ★ Of those, 61 million lived in Asia, 52 million in Africa, 10 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 7.3 million in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
- ★ SOS Enfants en Detresse, a French charity that aims to restore a sense of normalcy to the lives of children indirectly impacted by war and conflict, established World Day for War Orphans.

International Day of Education

- ★ International Day of Education is observed on the 24th January 2025
- ★ The UN General Assembly declared the International Day of Education in December 2018 as a way to honor education and to think about how crucial learning is to progress and peace.
- ★ Institutions are not the only ones that can impart knowledge.
- ★ Access to education, which most of us probably take for granted, can help many people escape poverty and open the door to a bright future.
- ★ Statistics provided by UNESCO indicate that an estimated 258 million youngsters are not enrolled in school.

National Girl Child Day

- ★ National Girl Child Day is observed on the 24th January 2025.
- ★ The Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Government of India established National Girl Child Day in 2008, marking the beginning of the day's history.
- ★ Children who are girls regularly experience discrimination and injustice in Indian society.
- ★ They are frequently denied the opportunity to further their education and are required to help out around the house starting at a very young age.
- ★ The Government aims to convey the urgent need to treat female children equally and give them the opportunities they rightfully deserve through Girl Child Day.
- ★ As a result, the Government co-ordinates awareness programs to spread the word on every National Girl Child Day.

National Voters Day

- ★ National Voters Day is observed on the 25th of January.
- ★ This Year's Theme "Nothing Like Voting, I Vote for Sure" is a continuation of last year's theme emphasizing the importance of participation in the electoral process, and encouraging voters to take pride in exercising their franchise.
- ★ The Election Commission of India (ECI), which was established in 1950, was founded on January 25.

- ★ In order to encourage young people to participate in the election process, this day was first observed in 2011.
- ★ The primary goal of the Election Commission is to promote voter registration, especially among qualified voters.
- ★ Let us inform you that while the voting age was once 21 years old, it was decreased to 18 years old in 1988.
- ★ The voting age in India was lowered by the Sixty-First Amendment Bill of 1998.

National Tourism Day

- ★ National Tourism Day is observed on the 25th of January 2025.
- ★ National Tourism Day has a long history dating back to the Indian Government's proclamation of January 25 as Tourism Day in India.
- ★ This day was created to highlight the value of travel and raise awareness of how vital it is to the economy of the nation.
- ★ National Tourism Day originated from the Government of India's efforts to highlight the role of tourism in driving economic growth and fostering cultural exchange.
- ★ It is believed that the first National Tourism Day was celebrated in 1948.
- ★ To position India as a prominent global tourist hub, the Government introduced numerous initiatives, including campaigns and events.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day

- ★ International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2025 is observed every year on the 27th January.
- ★ The UN General Assembly adopted resolution 60/7 on November 1, 2005, to designate January 27 as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (IHRD).
- ★ On January 27, 2006, the first commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day was held at the UN Headquartered in New York City.
- ★ After that UN Headquarters commemorates this day every year.
- ★ While UN offices and other state offices across the world conduct their ceremonies.

Data Protection Day

- ★ Data Protection Day, also known as Data Privacy Day, is celebrated annually on January 28.
- ★ The purpose of this day is to raise awareness about data protection and privacy rights, emphasizing the need for individuals to safeguard their personal information in an increasingly digitized world.
- ★ As technology advances, the security of our data becomes a major concern, and Data Protection Day encourages both individuals and organizations to adopt measures that protect personal data from misuse.
- ★ The origins of Data Protection Day trace back to April 26, 2006, when the Council of Europe decided to establish the day as a way to promote awareness of data privacy.

- ★ The Council of Europe's Data Protection Convention, also known as Convention 108, was opened for signature on January 28, 1981, and the observance of Data Protection Day was set to coincide with this date.

OBITUTARY NEWS

Former Greek Prime Minister and Socialist Leader Costas Simitis

- ★ Former Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis, who ushered the country into the European Union's single currency in 2001, passed away at the age of 88.
- ★ The Government proclaimed four days of mourning and said his funeral will be at the state's expense.
- ★ He became the Co-founder of the Socialist PASOK party in 1974.
- ★ He became the successor to Andreas Papandreou, the founding leader of PASOK.
- ★ He served as Finance Minister (1985-1987), overseeing austerity measures to address Greece's economic problems.
- ★ He became Prime Minister of Greece from 1996 to 2004 after Papandreou resigned due to health issues.
- ★ He played a key role in reducing Greece's budget deficit and public debt to qualify for Eurozone membership in January 2001.

Amit Banerji, Co-Founder of Workspace Operator Table Space

- ★ Amit Banerji, co-founder of managed workspace operator Table Space, passed away at the age of 44.
- ★ Before founding Table Space in 2017 with Karan Chopra, Banerji worked at Accenture for over 13 years and served as the Managing Director of Corporate Real Estate in India.
- ★ Table Space was co-founded by Banerji and Chopra, along with six other key co-founders: Kunal Mehra, Srinivas Prasad, Krishnaswamy Nagarajan, Anurag Tyagi, Nitish Bhasin, and Anamika Gupta.
- ★ Table Space, a managed workspace operator, aimed for a \$2.5 billion valuation for its initial public offering (IPO) planned for 2025.

'Twin Peaks' Creator and Filmmaker David Lynch

- ★ David Lynch, the Iconic Director renowned for his surreal and haunting vision of America, has passed away.
- ★ Lynch was a central figure in shaping counterculture cinema, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, with films such as Blue Velvet, Wild at Heart, and Mulholland Drive.
- ★ His influence extended to television, where he co-created the groundbreaking series Twin Peaks alongside Mark Frost.

- ★ Lynch gained mainstream recognition with *The Elephant Man* (1980), which was nominated for eight Academy Awards. However, his version of *Dune* (1984) did not meet his expectations, and he was vocal about his frustration with not having creative control.

India's Preeminent Cardiac Surgeon K.M. Cherian

- ★ KM Cherian, a world-renowned cardiologist with over 50 years of experience, has passed away in Bengaluru at the age of 82.
- ★ His death comes shortly after he launched his biography in Kerala.
- ★ The biography of Dr. K.M. Cherian, is titled *Hand of God*.
- ★ Priya M Menon wrote the book, and Times Group Books published it.
- ★ Cherian was a pioneer in cardiac surgery, and one of his most notable achievements was performing India's first heart-lung transplant on a patient.
- ★ He founded the Frontier Lifeline Hospital and the Frontier Mediville, a large medical science park in Chennai, which became a hub for patients worldwide.
- ★ His expertise and innovative approaches attracted numerous international patients seeking treatment.

MISCELLANEOUS

President Droupadi Murmu Praises NIMHANS

- ★ During the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Bengaluru, Karnataka, President Droupadi Murmu lauded the institution for its innovative approach to integrating Yoga and Ayurveda into the treatment of mental health.
- ★ President Murmu praised NIMHANS for its integrative medicine services, emphasizing how combining modern healthcare systems with traditional methods such as Yoga and Ayurveda has proven effective in addressing both mental and physical distress.
- ★ She described NIMHANS' approach as a model for others, particularly in the treatment of psychiatric and neurological disorders.
- ★ President Murmu inaugurated key facilities, including the Psychiatry Specialty Block, Central Laboratory Complex, and Bhima Hostel.
- ★ She also dedicated advanced diagnostic equipment, such as the 3T MRI Scanner and DSA System, to the nation.
- ★ Tele-MANAS, a telemedicine service providing mental health counseling across India, and the SAMVAD platform, which addresses mental health concerns for both children and adults, were also lauded for their contributions to improving access to mental health services.

SBI Life Spell Bee Season 14 Concludes

- ★ SBI Life Spell Bee Season in association with Mirchi, India's most prestigious spelling competition concluded its 14th season with a thrilling Grand Finale in Kolkata.
- ★ The competition crowned Chaya M.V. from Presidency School, Bangalore its national champion.
- ★ The National Champion of SBI Life Spell Bee Season 14 was awarded the prestigious grand prize of INR 1,00,000/- along with an all-expenses-paid expedition to Disneyland, Hong Kong, accompanied by their parents.
- ★ The theme for this year's competition was 'Be Spellbound', which highlights the significance of words and spellings in shaping the expression of today's youth.
- ★ The theme reflects SBI Life's commitment to providing growth opportunities for India's young population.

Indonesia Prez Subianto to be Chief Guest at Republic Day 2025 Event

- ★ Indonesia President Prabowo Subianto will be the Chief Guest at the 76th Republic Day celebration to be held on 26th January 2025 at the Kartavya Path in New Delhi.
- ★ Incidentally, the first President of Indonesia Sukarno was the Chief Guest at the first Republic Day celebration held in New Delhi on 26 January 1950.
- ★ President Prabowo Subianto will be on an official visit to India on 25 and 26 January 2026.
- ★ This is the first official visit of President Prabowo Subianto to India since he was sworn in as the 8th President of Indonesia in October 2024.
- ★ During his visit to India, he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top Indian leadership and will discuss bilateral, regional, and international issues.
- ★ India and Indonesia share close ties and were the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961.

