



Shankar School of Banking

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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NATIONAL NEWS

Madhya Pradesh to Establish India's First PPP Model Medical Colleges

- ★ India is set to witness a major reform in medical education with the establishment of its first Public Private Partnership (PPP) model medical colleges in Madhya Pradesh.
- ★ The foundation stone for two such colleges in the tribal-dominated districts of Dhar and Betul was laid in the presence of J.P. Nadda, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, and Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.
- ★ Madhya Pradesh has become the first state in India to operationalise medical colleges under the PPP model, particularly in tribal and backward regions.
- ★ Medical education in India has traditionally been concentrated in urban and semi-urban areas, resulting in shortages of doctors and medical institutions in tribal and remote districts.
- ★ The PPP initiative aims to address regional imbalance in medical education and healthcare delivery.
- ★ Under the PPP framework:
 - The State Government provides land (up to 25 acres) on lease.
 - Private partners construct infrastructure, including college buildings, hostels, laboratories and residential facilities.
 - Existing district hospitals are upgraded and used as teaching hospitals.
 - District hospitals remain under State Government control to ensure uninterrupted public healthcare services.
 - All development and upgrades will strictly follow National Medical Commission (NMC) norms.
 - The first phase includes medical colleges in Dhar (western Madhya Pradesh) and Betul (central Madhya Pradesh).
 - In total, four PPP-based medical colleges are planned in the state at Dhar, Betul, Katni and Panna, all linked with district hospitals.

India to Host 4th India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi

- ★ India will host the 4th Edition of the India AI Impact Summit in New Delhi from 15 to 20 February.
- ★ The India AI Impact Summit aims to shape the future of inclusive, responsible, and resilient Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- ★ The summit is anchored on three guiding principles, namely People, Planet, and Progress.
- ★ These principles emphasize AI for human welfare, environmental protection, and inclusive economic growth.

- ★ India has formally invited China to participate in the India AI Impact Summit, indicating a gradual thaw in bilateral relations.
- ★ The invitation reflects a shared focus on building domestic AI capacity and co-operation in emerging technologies.
- ★ Previous editions of the India AI Impact Summit were hosted by the United Kingdom (2023), South Korea, and France.
- ★ China participated in the South Korea and France editions after initial debate during the UK-hosted summit.

Parvati–Arga Bird Sanctuary Declared Eco-Sensitive Zone in Uttar Pradesh

- ★ The Union Government has declared the Parvati–Arga Bird Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh as an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) to strengthen biodiversity conservation and ecological protection.
- ★ The decision aims to create a protective buffer around the sanctuary while promoting sustainable and responsible eco-tourism.
- ★ Parvati–Arga Bird Sanctuary is a significant wetland ecosystem in Uttar Pradesh, located in the Gangetic plains, and is known for supporting rich avian biodiversity.
- ★ The sanctuary attracts a large number of resident and migratory bird species and plays an important role in maintaining water balance and supporting nature-based local livelihoods.
- ★ The sanctuary covers an area of about 1,084 hectares and serves as a crucial stopover site for migratory birds arriving annually from Central Asia and Tibet, making it part of an important international migratory corridor.
- ★ Declaration as an Eco-Sensitive Zone provides a regulated buffer around the core protected area to control activities that may harm wildlife, vegetation and water bodies.
- ★ The ESZ status helps prevent unregulated construction, pollution and industrial activities, ensuring long-term ecological conservation of the wetland habitat.
- ★ According to Kirti Vardhan Singh, the move reflects the government's commitment to balancing environmental conservation with sustainable development.
- ★ The objectives of the ESZ notification include conservation of bird habitats and wetland ecology, promotion of responsible eco-tourism, prevention of ecological degradation, strengthening biodiversity management, and supporting sustainable livelihoods linked to conservation.

HP Launches 'Green to Gold' Initiative for Industrial Hemp Cultivation

- ★ Himachal Pradesh has initiated the cultivation of industrial hemp as part of a major policy shift aimed at transforming the rural economy, promoting sustainability, and strengthening the bio-economy.
- ★ Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu launched the 'Green to Gold' initiative, envisioning hemp as a key driver to achieve a self-reliant Himachal Pradesh by 2027 and to position the state as a leader in the green and bio-based economy.
- ★ Cannabis had traditionally grown wild in regions such as Kullu, Mandi and Chamba, often associated with the illegal drug trade. Under the new policy framework, the state has redefined hemp as a regulated industrial resource instead of an illicit crop.

- ★ Industrial hemp has been identified as a high-value, multi-use crop, with applications in medicinal uses (pain management and inflammation control), textiles and apparel, paper and packaging, cosmetics and personal care products, biofuel and renewable energy.
- ★ A key feature of the policy is strict regulation, with all cultivated hemp required to have tetrahydrocannabinol content below 0.3 percent, which is an internationally accepted scientific threshold.
- ★ This limit ensures that the crop is non-intoxicating, unsuitable for drug misuse, and safe for industrial fibre and seed utilisation, balancing economic benefits with social and legal safeguards.
- ★ The initiative is expected to create new livelihood opportunities for farmers, rural youth and startups, while supplying the growing pharmaceutical and wellness industries.

NHAI Withdraws Know Your Vehicle (KYV) Requirement for Car FASTags

- ★ The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has announced the withdrawal of the Know Your Vehicle (KYV) requirement for Car/Jeep/Van FASTag category.
- ★ The revised rule will be applicable to all new FASTag issuances from 1st February 2026.
- ★ The decision aims to improve commuter convenience and eliminate post-activation hassles faced by private vehicle owners.
- ★ Earlier, vehicle owners had to undergo KYV verification even after submitting valid documents at the time of FASTag purchase, leading to delays and repeated follow-ups.
- ★ For already issued FASTags, KYV will no longer be enforced as a standard requirement.
- ★ KYV checks will now be triggered only in exceptional cases, such as Incorrectly issued FASTags, Loose or tampered FASTags and Suspected misuse or complaints.
- ★ In the absence of complaints, existing car FASTags will not undergo KYV verification.
- ★ To maintain system integrity, pre-activation verification norms have been strengthened.
- ★ Issuer Banks must complete all vehicle validation checks before FASTag activation.
- ★ FASTag activation will be allowed only after mandatory vehicle verification through the VAHAN database.
- ★ The earlier practice of post-activation vehicle validation has been completely discontinued.
- ★ If vehicle details are not available on VAHAN, Issuer Banks must conduct RC-based verification prior to activation, with full responsibility for accuracy.
- ★ FASTags sold through online platforms will also be activated only after prescribed verification is completed by banks.

Gujarat to Host Indian AI Research Organization at GIFT City from 2026

- ★ India is set to strengthen its artificial intelligence research ecosystem with the establishment of the Indian AI Research Organization (IAIRO) at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), Gandhinagar.
- ★ The Gujarat Government, led by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, has given in-principle approval for this initiative, which will become operational from 1 January 2026.

- ★ IAIRO will be India's first state-led artificial intelligence research body and will function under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, marking a significant step in collaboration between government, industry, and academia.
- ★ The organization will be set up through a tripartite partnership involving the Government of Gujarat, the Government of India, and the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA).
- ★ It will be registered as a non-profit entity, incorporated under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, and will operate as a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV).
- ★ The initiative aligns with the India AI Mission of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Gujarat Artificial Intelligence Action Plan under the state's Science and Technology Department.

Assam Constitutes India's First 8th State Pay Commission

- ★ Assam became the first state in India to constitute its 8th State Pay Commission, marking a proactive step in Government pay reforms.
- ★ The decision was announced by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, ahead of the expiry of the 7th State Pay Commission on January 1, 2026.
- ★ A Pay Commission is constituted to review and recommend revisions in salaries, allowances, service benefits, and pensions of Government employees and pensioners.
- ★ The 8th State Pay Commission will replace the existing 7th Pay Commission framework and recommend revised pay structures based on inflation, current economic conditions, and the fiscal capacity of the state.
- ★ Former Assam Chief Secretary Subhas Das has been appointed as the Chairman of the 8th State Pay Commission.
- ★ With this move, Assam has moved ahead of other states and even the Union Government, as the 8th Central Pay Commission has not yet formally begun its work.
- ★ The early constitution of the commission is significant as it provides early clarity to State Government employees and pensioners regarding future pay revisions.
- ★ It may enable faster submission of recommendations compared to other states, potentially leading to earlier implementation of revised salaries and pensions.
- ★ Experts note that Pay Commissions generally take around 18 months to finalise and submit their reports.
- ★ Pay Commissions in India are periodically set up, and their recommendations require Government approval before implementation.
- ★ Salary and pension revisions are often implemented retrospectively, with arrears paid at a later stage.
- ★ Although January 1, 2026 is the reference date, actual implementation of the recommendations may occur in late 2026 or early 2027.
- ★ Assam's early initiation of the process could give its state employees an advantage over employees in other states.

Surat Set to Become India's First Slum-Free City

- ★ Surat in Gujarat is close to becoming India's first slum-free city, due to large-scale redevelopment of slum clusters into permanent housing with basic civic amenities.
- ★ The initiative is being implemented by the Surat Municipal Corporation, using a mission-mode approach under central and state housing schemes.
- ★ Most slum areas are being redeveloped through in-situ slum redevelopment, where multi-storey apartment complexes are constructed at the same location.
- ★ Slum-dwelling families are provided permanent and legal housing, ensuring they are not displaced far from livelihoods, schools, or social networks.
- ★ The housing projects provide durable flats with essential civic amenities, including piped drinking water, proper drainage and sewage systems, street lighting, paved internal roads, sanitation, and waste management facilities.
- ★ Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) provides central financial assistance, while Gujarat state housing policies complement funding and implementation.
- ★ Strong coordination between local, state, and central agencies has enabled Surat to achieve faster and more effective slum redevelopment compared to many other Indian cities.
- ★ Achieving slum-free status is expected to improve urban living standards and public health, reduce inequality and social exclusion, and enhance efficient land use and city aesthetics.
- ★ The initiative supports Sustainable Development Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities and serves as a replicable model for urban housing and slum rehabilitation across India.

Gujarat Sets Up Cyber Security Panels to Protect Energy Infrastructure

- ★ The Gujarat Government has constituted an 11-member Core Committee and a 19-member Task Force to protect the state's energy infrastructure from cyber-attacks.
- ★ The decision has been taken by the Energy and Petrochemicals Department (EPD), Gujarat, in view of rising cyber risks due to increased digitalisation in the power sector.
- ★ The move focuses on securing smart grids, SCADA systems, smart meters, and digital power supply networks that support 24×7 electricity services.
- ★ The Core Committee will review the overall cyber security strategy in the energy sector and examine policies, preparedness, and system resilience.
- ★ It will also suggest long-term frameworks and improvements to strengthen cyber security of critical energy infrastructure.
- ★ The Task Force will focus on operational and technical implementation of cyber security measures across the power sector.
- ★ It will support training programmes, cyber drills, coordination activities, and on-ground execution of security protocols.
- ★ Both bodies will review existing IT and cyber security arrangements and assess the state's preparedness to handle cyber incidents.
- ★ They will recommend policy improvements and develop a clear roadmap for building a robust cyber security system in the energy sector.

- ★ The initiative includes capacity building measures, such as regular cyber drills, awareness programmes, and training for officials.
- ★ The state will promote coordination with academic institutions, cyber security experts, and state and national agencies.

E-Bill System for Fertiliser Subsidy Launched to Enhance Transparency

- ★ The E-Bill System for fertiliser subsidies has been inaugurated by Jagat Prakash Nadda, Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers, in New Delhi.
- ★ The system will be used to process fertiliser subsidy payments of around ₹2 lakh crore, marking a major shift towards digital, transparent, and efficient financial governance.
- ★ The E-Bill System is an end-to-end online digital platform designed to process fertiliser subsidy claims electronically.
- ★ Earlier, fertiliser subsidy bills were processed through physical files, manual verification, and multiple approval layers, which often resulted in delays and inefficiencies.
- ★ Under the new system, subsidy claims will move digitally from fertiliser companies to the Government through an integrated electronic workflow.
- ★ The system eliminates paperwork, speeds up approvals, and ensures that payments are released only after system-based verification.
- ★ Built-in checks and controls have been introduced to strengthen financial discipline and transparency.
- ★ Each bill is verified against predefined rules before payment approval.
- ★ All actions taken on a bill are digitally recorded, creating a complete audit trail.
- ★ The system reduces the risk of errors, duplication, and misuse of public funds.

Union Home Minister Inaugurates Development Projects in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- ★ Union Home Minister and Minister of Co-operation Shri Amit Shah inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of multiple development projects of the Andaman and Nicobar Administration at Sri Vijaya Puram.
- ★ Shri Amit Shah also inaugurated an exhibition on the three new criminal laws at Sri Vijaya Puram.
- ★ He recalled that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was the first to hoist the Tricolour in free India at this place and noted that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi renamed islands as Shaheed Dweep and Swaraj Dweep in his honour.
- ★ On the occasion, nine development projects were inaugurated and foundation stones for two projects were laid, amounting to ₹373 crore in a single day.
- ★ Major projects include an Integrated Command and Control Centre worth ₹229 crore, Phase-I of a District Hospital costing ₹33 crore, a Forensic Science Laboratory, and six other schemes worth ₹50 crore.

- ★ Development is underway across sectors such as tourism, environment, fisheries, agriculture, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises, and clean energy.
- ★ The upcoming Great Nicobar Project is expected to transform the region into a global trade hub and strategic security centre, and a major international tourism destination in the coming decade.
- ★ The islands are being upgraded to International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standards for scuba diving and adventure water sports.
- ★ Under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, 2.4 million trees have been planted, highlighting environmental commitment.
- ★ 98% household waste collection by the Sri Vijaya Puram Municipal Council was cited as a major success under the Swachh Bharat Mission.

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) Completes 9 Years

- ★ The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) completed nine years of implementation on 1st January 2026, marking a significant milestone in India's efforts to strengthen maternal health, nutrition, and women's welfare.
- ★ PMMVY was launched on 1st January 2017 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD).
- ★ The scheme is implemented in accordance with Section 4 of the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, which mandates maternity benefits for eligible women.
- ★ The primary objective of PMMVY is to provide partial wage compensation to pregnant women and lactating mothers and to promote safe pregnancy and institutional childbirth.
- ★ The scheme aims to reduce maternal and infant malnutrition and improve overall maternal and child health outcomes.
- ★ PMMVY also envisages the provision of free, nutritious meals through Anganwadi Centres during pregnancy and for six months after childbirth, as per prescribed nutritional norms.
- ★ In 2022, PMMVY was brought under Mission Shakti, an umbrella initiative for women's safety, security, and empowerment.
- ★ Under Mission Shakti, PMMVY is part of the Samarthya component, which focuses on economic empowerment and financial inclusion of women.
- ★ This integration improved scheme convergence, monitoring efficiency, and targeted delivery of benefits at the grassroots level.
- ★ Under PMMVY, benefits are provided for the first two living children, with the condition that the second child must be a girl, promoting gender equity and the value of the girl child.

Karnataka Records First Sighting of Rare 'Sandalwood Leopard'

- ★ Karnataka has recorded its first-ever sighting of an ultra-rare strawberry-coloured leopard, popularly named the "Sandalwood Leopard", drawing national and global attention.
- ★ This is only the second recorded sighting in India, with the earlier instance reported from Ranakpur, Rajasthan, in 2021.

- ★ Leopards usually have a tawny-yellow coat with black rosettes, whereas the Sandalwood Leopard displays a pale reddish-pink or strawberry-coloured coat with light-brown rosettes.
- ★ Internationally, such leopards are referred to as “strawberry leopards”.
- ★ Scientists attribute this rare coloration to unusual genetic conditions such as hypomelanism (reduced dark pigmentation) or erythrism (excess red pigmentation), making the animal extremely rare.
- ★ The leopard was documented in Vijayanagara district, Karnataka, using camera traps.
- ★ The discovery was made by conservation scientist Sanjay Gubbi and his team from the Holematthi Nature Foundation.
- ★ The animal is believed to be a seven-year-old female, and one camera trap image captured her along with a cub of normal coat colour.
- ★ At the global level, this colour morph has been documented only five times: twice in South Africa, once in Tanzania, and twice in India.
- ★ Naming the animal the “Sandalwood Leopard” reflects Karnataka’s cultural and ecological association with sandalwood forests.
- ★ Karnataka is already known for having one of the highest densities of melanistic leopards, commonly called black panthers.

Prasar Bharati to Resume Thadou Language Broadcasts in Manipur

- ★ Prasar Bharati has initiated efforts to resume live radio programmes in the Thadou language from All India Radio Imphal, halted during Manipur’s ethnic violence in 2023.
- ★ The step follows requests from Thadou community organisations and is aimed at cultural inclusion and confidence-building in the state.
- ★ Administrative and staffing preparations have begun, including recalling earlier Thadou staff or recruiting new personnel for live broadcasts.
- ★ Prior to the violence, live Thadou programmes were aired daily; currently, only recorded Thadou songs are broadcast from 5:00 – 5:30 pm.
- ★ Live programmes are seen as crucial for preserving language, culture, and social identity of the Thadou community, while promoting peace and mutual respect among ethnic groups.
- ★ The move aligns with wider assertions of Thadou identity following events such as the killing of Thadou leader Nehkam Jomhao in August 2024 and the Thadou declaration in Guwahati, November 2024 reaffirming them as an independent indigenous tribe.
- ★ **Thadou Tribe Key Facts:**
 - Indigenous to hill areas around Imphal Valley, Manipur, with smaller populations in Nagaland, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Delhi.
 - Population in Manipur: 190,595 (Census 2011), second-largest tribe after Meiteis.
 - Language: Thadou and Chin, part of Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family.
 - Cultural affiliation: Shares heritage with Chin–Kuki–Mizo community.
- ★ The initiative highlights the role of Prasar Bharati and regional language broadcasting in promoting social harmony, cultural preservation, and nation-building.

India Releases Literary Works to Promote Classical Languages and Inclusive Access

- ★ Union Education Minister Shri Dharmendra Pradhan will release 55 literary works developed by Centres of Excellence for Classical Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia, along with Tirukkural books and a sign language series in New Delhi.
- ★ The publications aim to preserve ancient texts, support research and education, and are designed for both scholars and general readers.
- ★ The works are developed under the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), which promotes linguistic diversity, multilingual education, and documentation of Indian languages.
- ★ The Tirukkural series includes 13 books, and a 45-episode sign language interpretation series improves access for persons with hearing disabilities.
- ★ The initiative strengthens cultural continuity, encourages young learners to engage with ancient texts, promotes inclusive education, and reinforces India's multilingual and multicultural identity.
- ★ India has 11 classical languages officially recognized for their ancient origins and rich literary traditions: Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Sanskrit, Odia, Marathi, Assamese, Pali, Prakrit, and Marathi. Dedicated institutions support their study and promotion, forming the foundation of India's cultural heritage.

India's AYUSH System Gains Global Recognition

- ★ India's traditional healthcare system AYUSH has been formally recognised in bilateral trade agreements with Oman and New Zealand, finalized.
- ★ The agreements cover traditional medicine and health-related services, providing regulatory clarity and facilitating smoother trade.
- ★ AYUSH recognition in these agreements strengthens India's presence in global traditional medicine markets and promotes herbal products and wellness services.
- ★ AYUSH systems include Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy, focusing on preventive and holistic healthcare.
- ★ Global recognition enhances credibility, supports Indian exporters entering regulated markets, and encourages research and wellness collaborations. It also advances India's soft power through health diplomacy.
- ★ Export growth highlights rising global demand: AYUSH and herbal exports increased by 6.11%, from USD 649.2 million (2023–24) to USD 688.89 million (2024–25).
- ★ The sector includes medicines, wellness services, and education, with export promotion being a key Government focus.

India to Launch First Hydrogen-Powered Train in Haryana

- ★ India's first hydrogen-powered train is set to operate in Haryana.
- ★ The pilot project between Jind and Sonipat is in the final commissioning stage, with the hydrogen plant ready at Jind.
- ★ The train is a Northern Railway pilot project aimed at demonstrating hydrogen as a clean fuel for rail transport.

- ★ The train-set has been manufactured and tested.
- ★ A hydrogen plant with 3,000 kg storage capacity has been set up at Jind.
- ★ Hydrogen is produced using the electrolysis process, powered by a stable 11 kV electricity supply for uninterrupted operation.
- ★ Haryana Chief Secretary Anurag Rastogi coordinated with Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam to monitor power supply.
- ★ The project follows RDSO specifications to ensure safety and performance.
- ★ Hydrogen trains produce zero carbon emissions at the point of use and serve as a sustainable alternative to diesel trains on non-electrified routes.
- ★ The initiative supports India's green energy and climate goals.

Tamil Nadu Announces TAPS for Government Employees

- ★ Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced the Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS) guaranteeing 50% of last drawn monthly salary as pension for State Government employees and teachers.
- ★ The announcement comes ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections, following a 23-year demand for restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS).
- ★ Under TAPS, employees will contribute 10% of their basic salary, while the remaining share will be borne by the State Government. Under OPS, the Government fully funded pensions.
- ★ Employee unions, who had threatened an indefinite strike from January 6, have withdrawn their protest after the announcement.
- ★ Although the official statement did not mention an implementation date, Government sources indicated that TAPS may come into force from January 1, 2027.
- ★ The scheme will impose a significant financial burden on the state, including a one-time contribution of ₹13,000 crore and annual expenditure of ₹11,000 crore, which will be revised with salary hikes.
- ★ Pensioners will receive Dearness Allowance (DA) hikes every six months, similar to serving employees.
- ★ In case of a pensioner's death, 60% of the pension will be provided as family pension to eligible dependents.
- ★ Gratuity up to ₹25 lakh will be provided at retirement or in case of death during service, based on length of service.
- ★ TAPS ensures minimum pension for employees retiring without completing qualifying service and provides compassionate pension for CPS employees who retired without pension before TAPS.
- ★ Tamil Nadu's committed expenditure already stands at 62% of revenue receipts, including pensions (14%), and is expected to rise with TAPS implementation.
- ★ The announcement follows recommendations of a committee headed by IAS Officer Gagandeep Singh Bedi and fulfils the DMK's 2021 election promise on pension reform.

India's Largest Integrated Inland Rainbow Trout Farm Inaugurated in Telangana

- ★ Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh, along with Union Coal and Mines Minister G. Kishan Reddy, inaugurated India's largest integrated inland Rainbow Trout farm in Ranga Reddy district, Telangana.
- ★ The farm has been established by SmartGreen Aquaculture, a startup, with an estimated investment of around ₹50 crore.
- ★ The project is notable because Rainbow Trout is traditionally a cold-water species, usually farmed only in high-altitude Himalayan regions, but this farm enables trout cultivation in the warm Deccan Plateau climate using advanced engineering and innovative technology.
- ★ The initiative marks a major technological milestone in aquaculture, supporting diversification of fish species and boosting inland fish production.
- ★ On the occasion, the Union Minister assured full support for trout export through the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), enhancing opportunities for international trade and farmer income.

Assam Governor Launches 'Sanskaar Shaala' Value-Based Education Programme

- ★ Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya inaugurated the Sanskaar Shaala programme in Guwahati.
- ★ It is a value-based education initiative designed for children aged 4 to 14 years.
- ★ The programme focuses on moral education, ethics, compassion, Indian cultural values, and social responsibility.
- ★ It aims to complement formal education and help build responsible, disciplined and value-oriented citizens.
- ★ The Governor highlighted that values form the foundation of personality and social harmony and should accompany academic learning.
- ★ He also stressed that ancient Indian texts provide timeless guidance on righteous living.
- ★ The initiative is significant for preserving India's moral and cultural heritage, encouraging early social responsibility, and balancing technological progress with ethics.
- ★ During the event, the Governor also attended the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Guwahati Blind High School.

Government Announced 'SAMPANN' System Transforming Pension Administration

- ★ The Government of India announced that SAMPANN (System for Accounting and Management of Pension) enables pensioners to securely access, store, and retrieve official pension documents anytime and anywhere.
- ★ SAMPANN is an integrated online pension management system for Department of Telecommunications (DoT) pensioners.
- ★ It provides a single platform for processing, sanctioning, and directly disbursing pension into bank accounts.

- ★ The system offers online grievance redressal, digital profile management, and transaction records, improving transparency and efficiency.
- ★ Important pension documents including Gratuity Payment Orders, Pension Certificates/ePPOs, Pension Commutation Orders, and Form 16 are now available through DigiLocker, supporting digital governance and paperless services.
- ★ During the 15th Pension Adalat held at IIPA on 24th December 2025, 1,087 long-pending pension grievances were taken up and 815 were resolved on the spot.
- ★ Gross enrolment under Atal Pension Yojana (APY) reached 8,45,17,419 (as on 30 November 2025).
- ★ APY aims to provide a universal social security system, especially for the poor and unorganised sector workers, offering minimum guaranteed pensions of ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 per month.

Tamil Nadu Government Signs MoU with UN Women

- ★ The Government of Tamil Nadu signed an Memorandum of Understanding with UN Women to strengthen co-operation in advancing gender equality, women's safety, and women empowerment in the State.
- ★ The MoU was signed in the presence of Chief Minister M.K. Stalin.
- ★ Tamil Nadu Government will establish technical support mechanisms to promote gender equality and sustainable development focusing on women's welfare.
- ★ Key implementing departments: Social Welfare and Women Empowerment, Home and Excise, and Rural Development and Panchayat Raj.
- ★ A tripartite MoU was also signed among UNICEF, OECD, and OPSI to promote innovative governance services and validation mechanisms for Government and Quasi-Government Sectors.
- ★ This MoU focuses on creating new infrastructure facilities, formulating State-level innovative policies, and strengthening collaborative reform initiatives.
- ★ The State termed OECD collaboration as a major milestone in international institutional partnership.
- ★ The Chief Minister also released Tamil Nadu State Indicator Framework 2.0 with 244 indicators aligned to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

India to Host Inaugural India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026

- ★ The Election Commission of India (ECI) will host the first India International Conference on Democracy and Election Management (IICDEM) 2026 from January 21-23, 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.
- ★ It was organized by the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) under the aegis of ECI.
- ★ Theme: "Democracy for an inclusive, peaceful, resilient and sustainable world".
- ★ India holds the Chairship of the Council of Member States of International IDEA for 2026.

- ★ **Academic Contribution:** 36 thematic groups from IITs, IIMs, NLUs, and IIMCs to deliberate on electoral technology, governance, legal frameworks, and media.
- ★ **Conference Structure:** Inaugural session, EMB leaders' plenary, working group meetings, thematic sessions, launch of ECINet, and showcasing India's electoral innovations.
- ★ Objective is to strengthen democratic resilience, promote inclusive governance, ensure peace and stability, and link democracy with sustainable development.
- ★ IICDEM 2026 is positioned as the largest international electoral conference hosted by India, promoting India as a global hub for democratic governance and election management.
- ★ IIIDEM Dwarka campus to demonstrate India's capacity in training electoral professionals and sharing best practices internationally.

India's First Fully Paperless District Court Inaugurated in Kalpetta, Kerala

- ★ Chief Justice of India Surya Kant virtually inaugurated India's first fully paperless district court in Kalpetta, Wayanad, Kerala.
- ★ The initiative marks the complete digital transformation of district judiciary operations, covering case filing to final judgment.
- ★ Developed in-house by Kerala High Court, the system integrates Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist judicial processes and improve efficiency.
- ★ AI-powered case summaries, interactive Q&A for case analysis, digital annotations, voice-to-text for depositions, automated transcripts, and secure digital signatures.
- ★ Significant reduction in clerical delays, minimized court visits, lower litigation costs, no physical file storage, instant order communication, and faster case processing.
- ★ Online case filing, digital document uploads, AI-assisted analysis, digital hearing notices, electronic proceedings, AI-generated summaries, and secure digital judgment delivery.

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia Launches Speed Post 24 and Speed Post 48 Services

- ★ Union Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia announced the launch of two new India Post services: Speed Post 24 and Speed Post 48.
- ★ These services ensure time-bound delivery within 24 hours and 48 hours, respectively.
- ★ The announcement was made during a programme held at Pichhor in Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh.
- ★ The initiative is being seen as a major step towards modernisation of postal services in India.
- ★ According to the Minister, Speed Post 24 and Speed Post 48 will set a new benchmark for punctual, reliable and fast delivery across the country.
- ★ During the event, Jyotiraditya Scindia inaugurated the renovated Pichhor sub-post office, developed at a cost of ₹2 lakh.
- ★ He also laid the foundation stone and conducted the ground-breaking ceremony for a new sub-post office building at an estimated cost of ₹1 crore 11 lakh.

- ★ These initiatives aim to strengthen postal infrastructure and improve service delivery at the grassroots level.

Andhra Pradesh Approves Dagadarthi Greenfield Airport in Nellore District

- ★ The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet has approved the Dagadarthi Greenfield Airport project in Nellore district.
- ★ With this approval, Dagadarthi will become the 8th airport in Andhra Pradesh, strengthening the state's aviation network.
- ★ The project aims to improve regional connectivity, boost logistics and industrial growth, and integrate air transport with ports and highways.
- ★ The Dagadarthi airport is strategically located with strong connectivity to national highways, industrial clusters, and major ports.
- ★ It is close to Krishnapatnam Port and Ramayapatnam Port, enhancing port-led development and exports.
- ★ Proximity to industrial hubs such as KRIS City and Indian Farmers Fertiliser Co-operative Limited Special Economic Zones positions the airport as a key driver of manufacturing, agri-logistics and services-led growth in southern Andhra Pradesh.
- ★ The project has received in-principle clearance from the Ministry of Civil Aviation.
- ★ The State Government has issued a Request for Proposal to invite private players for development, operation and maintenance.
- ★ The airport will be developed under a long-term concession framework, following a public-private partnership model.
- ★ The airport will be developed in multiple phases over an area of 1,332.80 acres.

Punjabi Singer Kaka Launches 'Friendo' Women's Safety Mobile Application

- ★ Punjabi singer Kaka has launched a women's safety mobile application named Friendo, marking his initiative beyond the music industry.
- ★ The launch reflects increasing concern over crimes against women in India and highlights the role of technology and social responsibility in creating safer communities.
- ★ Friendo is currently in the testing phase and is available only for Android users.
- ★ The application focuses on providing quick emergency assistance and digital support tools for women and girls.
- ★ Friendo is a mobile safety application designed to help women during emergency situations.
- ★ It provides instant access to protective tools that can be activated quickly when a user feels unsafe.
- ★ Kaka described the app as a social responsibility project, aimed at women empowerment rather than commercial profit.
- ★ The app seeks to bridge the gap between victims and immediate help by integrating technology, connectivity and community support.

- ★ It is free to download and designed for easy use even in high-stress situations.
- ★ A dedicated SOS button allows users to send instant alerts to trusted contacts.
- ★ The app supports live location sharing, enabling contacts or nearby users to track the user's real-time location.
- ★ Alternative triggers such as shake detection and voice commands are provided for situations where manual phone usage is difficult.
- ★ These features ensure that help can be requested even when direct phone operation is not possible.
- ★ Friendo includes advanced and discreet safety tools for enhanced protection.
- ★ A stealth mode allows the app to function without drawing attention.
- ★ The app can automatically record audio or video, helping in evidence collection during emergencies.

Chhattisgarh Leads Large States in APAAR ID Generation

- ★ Chhattisgarh has emerged as the top-performing large state in generating APAAR (Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry) IDs, achieving around 88.63% coverage of enrolled students as of early January 2026.
- ★ The state has created 50,60,941 APAAR IDs out of 57,10,207 enrolled students across 57,045 schools, reflecting strong execution and administrative coordination.
- ★ APAAR ID is a permanent digital academic identity enabling secure storage of certificates, credits, achievements and academic records, ensuring academic continuity, supporting nationwide mobility, reducing paperwork and strengthening education governance under India's digital education reforms.
- ★ The initiative aligns with the national push towards Digital Public Infrastructure in Education, enhancing transparency and student-centric service delivery.
- ★ emetara recorded the highest coverage at 96.40%, followed by Rajnandgaon (96.38%), while districts like Raigarh, Korea, Raipur, Korba, Dhamtari, Durg and Balodabazar have crossed 93% coverage; most districts have achieved over 80%, except a few like Narayanpur, Bijapur, Sukma, Balrampur and Dantewada.
- ★ The State Government implemented a mission-mode strategy involving continuous monitoring, district-level targets and coordinated efforts by teachers, district administration and education departments to ensure inclusion of maximum students.
- ★ The Central Government has set the national deadline of January 31, 2026 for APAAR ID completion, and Chhattisgarh is on track with time-bound efforts to achieve full coverage.

Andhra Pradesh to Host World's Largest Green Ammonia Project at Kakinada

- ★ Andhra Pradesh will host the world's largest green ammonia project at Kakinada, being developed by AM Green, with a total investment of USD 10 billion.
- ★ The project aims to achieve a final production capacity of 1.5 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) by 2030, supporting India's first green ammonia exports.

- ★ The facility is being developed through the conversion of an existing ammonia-urea complex at Kakinada, enabling faster scaling and cost efficiency.
- ★ Phased commissioning plan includes 0.5 MTPA by 2027, 1.0 MTPA by 2028, and full capacity by 2030, making it the largest green ammonia project globally.
- ★ The project will be powered entirely by renewable energy, supported by around 7.5 GW of solar and wind capacity, nearly 1,950 MW of electrolyser capacity, and close to 2 GW of round-the-clock renewable power.
- ★ The project will enable India's first green ammonia exports, with planned offtake to Germany, Japan and Singapore.
- ★ The project is expected to generate up to 8,000 jobs during construction, along with significant long-term employment during operations and indirect jobs in renewable energy, logistics, ports and ancillary industries.
- ★ Green ammonia is produced using renewable electricity and green hydrogen, eliminating carbon emissions from conventional production and supporting decarbonisation of fertilisers, shipping and power sectors.
- ★ The project aligns with India's National Green Hydrogen Mission, helps reduce import dependence in fertilisers, and strengthens India's climate commitments and energy security.

A Decade of Startup India Movement Completed on National Startup Day

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked the completion of 10 years of the Startup India Movement on National Startup Day (16 January).
- ★ Startup India Movement was launched on 16 January 2016 with the objective of promoting innovation, nurturing entrepreneurs and building a strong startup ecosystem in India.
- ★ The initiative focuses on ease of doing business, regulatory simplification, funding support, mentorship and innovation-driven growth.
- ★ Over the past decade, Startup India has evolved into a nationwide ecosystem connecting government, investors, incubators, academic institutions, mentors and young innovators.
- ★ Since its launch, over 2 lakh startups have been officially recognised under the Startup India initiative.
- ★ Recognised startups operate across sectors such as fintech, health-tech, ed-tech, agritech, clean energy, space and defence.

Bharat Electricity Summit 2026 to Be Held in New Delhi from March 19–22

- ★ Bharat Electricity Summit 2026 will be held from 19–22 March 2026 at Yashobhoomi, New Delhi.
- ★ The summit was announced by Union Power Minister Manohar Lal.
- ★ It is a global conference-cum-exhibition focused on the power and electricity sector.
- ★ The event aims to showcase India's leadership in the global clean energy transition and its journey from energy scarcity to energy abundance.
- ★ The summit will address challenges across power generation, transmission, distribution, storage and smart consumption.

- ★ It will bring together stakeholders from government, industry, academia and civil society on a common platform.
- ★ The theme of the summit is “Electrifying Growth. Empowering Sustainability. Connecting Globally”.
- ★ Key focus areas include clean energy deployment, energy efficiency, grid resilience, battery storage, energy transition technologies and global partnerships.
- ★ A Buyer–Seller Meet will be organised to promote investment, partnerships and cross-border collaboration.
- ★ The summit aims to mobilise investments, foster global co-operation, and accelerate the deployment of clean and sustainable electricity solutions worldwide.

Madhya Pradesh Signs MoU with Digital India BHASHINI

- ★ The Government of Madhya Pradesh has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Digital India BHASHINI Division to integrate multilingual and AI-powered language technologies across State Government digital platforms.
- ★ The objective is to promote inclusive, citizen-centric and voice-first digital governance, ensuring improved last-mile delivery of public services in Indian languages.
- ★ The MoU was signed at the Madhya Pradesh Regional AI Impact Conference 2026, held in Bhopal.
- ★ The conference was organised by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of Madhya Pradesh, in collaboration with the IndiaAI Mission.
- ★ It brought together policymakers, startups, industry leaders, academia and central agencies to deliberate on responsible and inclusive adoption of artificial intelligence in governance.
- ★ Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, while inaugurating the conference, outlined the state’s vision of citizen-centric AI governance.
- ★ He announced that Madhya Pradesh will soon introduce a State Artificial Intelligence Policy in mission mode, indicating a structured and long-term roadmap for AI adoption.
- ★ Under the MoU, BHASHINI’s language technologies and translation APIs will be integrated into state digital platforms.
- ★ The partnership also promotes voice-first AI solutions, which are particularly beneficial for rural populations, elderly citizens and people with limited digital literacy.

India’s First NAMO Book Fest Launched in New Delhi

- ★ India witnessed a new literary initiative with the launch of the first-ever NAMO Book Fest in New Delhi.
- ★ Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh released two books at the event, marking the debut of a national-level literary festival focused on ideas and leadership.
- ★ At the inaugural NAMO Book Fest, the books ‘Gen V Bano’ and ‘Mahatma’ were released.
- ★ The books focus on inspiration, leadership, vision, values, and ethical living in contemporary India.

- ★ The releases highlighted the role of literature in shaping national character and a forward-looking mindset among youth.
- ★ The NAMO Book Fest is being organised as a two-day event.
- ★ It features a curated exhibition of books centred on the life, ideas, and leadership of Narendra Modi.
- ★ The festival provides a platform for authors, intellectuals, thinkers, and young readers to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas.
- ★ The initiative aims to promote reading culture, intellectual engagement, and discussion on governance, nation-building, and innovation.
- ★ It reflects growing recognition of the importance of books and ideas in shaping public discourse.
- ★ The festival seeks to connect governance, culture, and youth participation within India's intellectual ecosystem.

Maharashtra Cabinet Approves Bembla River Irrigation Project and MAHIMA Agency

- ★ The Maharashtra Cabinet approved the ₹4,775 crore Bembla River Irrigation Project in Yavatmal district and cleared the establishment of a new overseas employment facilitation agency named MAHIMA.
- ★ The Bembla River Irrigation Project will be implemented in Yavatmal district, Maharashtra, to strengthen agricultural infrastructure.
- ★ The project will bring 52,423 hectares of land under assured irrigation across five talukas, reducing dependence on monsoon rainfall.
- ★ With a total cost of ₹4,775 crore, the project aims to improve crop productivity, enhance farmer incomes, and reduce agrarian distress, particularly in drought-prone Vidarbha region.
- ★ Improved irrigation is expected to support crop diversification, enable a shift from low-value rain-fed crops to higher-value crops, and ensure long-term water security.
- ★ The project will also generate employment opportunities during construction and allied activities and strengthen regional food security.
- ★ Alongside irrigation reforms, the Cabinet approved the creation of the Maharashtra Agency for Holistic International Mobility and Advancements (MAHIMA).
- ★ MAHIMA will focus on providing overseas employment opportunities for trained and skilled youth from Maharashtra.
- ★ The agency will work on coordination, skill mapping, and implementation mechanisms to connect the state's workforce with global labour markets.
- ★ The initiative aims to reduce unemployment, increase remittance inflows, and provide international exposure to Maharashtra's youth.

India Launches First Open-Sea Marine Fish Farming Project

- ★ India has launched its first-ever open-sea marine fish farming pilot project in the Andaman Sea, marking a shift from coastal aquaculture to open-ocean farming.

- ★ The initiative supports sustainable fisheries, livelihood generation, and India's expanding focus on the Blue Economy.
- ★ The project was launched by Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, during a field visit to North Bay, Andaman Sea.
- ★ It is described as a landmark effort to unlock the economic potential of India's oceans, which remained underutilised for decades.
- ★ The project reflects increased policy attention on maritime resources since 2014.
- ★ The pilot focuses on marine finfish and seaweed cultivation in open-sea conditions, away from the coastline.
- ★ Special open-sea cages, developed by the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), are used to withstand strong currents and waves.
- ★ Deep-water seaweed farming techniques are being promoted to ensure sustainability and higher productivity.
- ★ The project is implemented through collaboration between the Ministry of Earth Sciences, NIOT, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration.
- ★ During the launch, seaweed seeds were distributed to local fishing communities, and finfish seeds were provided for cage-based farming.
- ★ The initiative aims to diversify income sources for fishing communities while ensuring ecologically responsible marine use.
- ★ The government-led pilot may later be expanded through public-private partnerships, depending on outcomes, to accelerate growth in the Blue Economy sector.
- ★ Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, livelihoods, and job creation while preserving marine ecosystems.
- ★ It aims to balance economic development with environmental sustainability, supporting fisheries, food security, renewable energy, tourism, and climate resilience.

India's First Sleeper Vande Bharat Train Launched Between Howrah and Guwahati

- ★ Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off India's first sleeper Vande Bharat train, connecting Kolkata (Howrah) with Guwahati (Kamakhya).
- ★ The train was launched from Malda, West Bengal, marking a new phase in long-distance modern rail travel.
- ★ The Vande Bharat Sleeper Train is an upgraded version of the Vande Bharat Express, specifically designed for long-distance overnight journeys. Unlike chair-car Vande Bharat trains, it features sleeping berths comparable to Rajdhani-class comfort, combined with modern interiors and faster travel.
- ★ The train is fully Made in India and reflects Indian Railways' focus on self-reliance, modernisation, and enhanced passenger comfort.
- ★ The sleeper Vande Bharat will operate between Howrah and Kamakhya six days a week in both directions.
- ★ The train is equipped with modern coaches, improved safety systems, and upgraded interiors, offering faster and more reliable overnight travel between West Bengal and Assam.

- ★ Along with the sleeper Vande Bharat, the Prime Minister also launched four Amrit Bharat Express trains from West Bengal, connecting New Jalpaiguri–Nagercoil, New Jalpaiguri–Tiruchirappalli, Alipurduar–Bengaluru (SMVT), and Alipurduar–Mumbai (Panvel), improving affordable long-distance connectivity to southern and western India.
- ★ Vande Bharat trains are semi-high-speed trains introduced in 2019 and manufactured in India under Make in India.
- ★ At present, around 150 Vande Bharat trains operate across the country, with the sleeper variant designed specifically for long-distance overnight routes.

Two MSME Technology Centres Approved in Himachal Pradesh

- ★ The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has approved the establishment of two MSME Technology Centres in Himachal Pradesh at Pandoga (Una district) and Parwanoo (Solan district) as part of a nationwide expansion initiative.
- ★ The MSME Ministry plays a crucial role in promoting small businesses, entrepreneurship, and industrial growth through policy support, financial assistance, infrastructure development, and skill training.
- ★ Approval of these centres reflects the ministry's focus on regional industrial development, particularly in hill and less-industrialised states.
- ★ The Technology Centres will be set up at Pandoga in Una district and Parwanoo in Solan district. Parwanoo is a well-known industrial hub located near Chandigarh, while Pandoga is expected to emerge as a new growth centre, helping achieve balanced regional development within the state.
- ★ Each centre will be developed at an estimated cost of ₹10 crore.
- ★ The two centres are among 13 new MSME Technology Centre Extension Centres approved across India, aimed at strengthening technical infrastructure and improving MSME productivity.
- ★ The centres will provide modern technical support to local industries, including advanced manufacturing techniques, design assistance, and quality improvement, which is expected to attract new industrial investment in manufacturing and allied sectors.
- ★ A key objective is employment generation and skill development.
- ★ The centres will offer technical training, hands-on skill programmes, and entrepreneurship support, improving employability, promoting self-employment and startups, and helping reduce migration by strengthening the local economy.

Cabinet Approves Extension of Atal Pension Yojana (APY) with Funding Support

- ★ The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, approved the continuation of Atal Pension Yojana (APY) up to FY 2030-31.
- ★ The scheme will receive government support for promotional and developmental activities to expand outreach among unorganised workers.
- ★ Gap funding will be provided to meet viability requirements and ensure the sustainability of APY.
- ★ APY ensures old-age income security for millions of low-income and unorganised sector workers.
- ★ The scheme enhances financial inclusion and supports India's transition to a pensioned society.

- ★ APY strengthens the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 by providing sustainable social security.
- ★ APY was launched on 9th May 2015 to provide old-age income security to unorganised sector workers.
- ★ APY offers a guaranteed minimum pension of ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 per month starting at age 60, based on contributions.
- ★ As of 19th January 2026, over 8.66 crore subscribers have been enrolled under APY.
- ★ Continuous government support is essential for awareness, capacity building, and bridging viability gaps to ensure scheme sustainability.

Punjab Inaugurates First Dog Sanctuary in Ludhiana

- ★ Punjab has opened its first Dog Sanctuary in Ludhiana as a pilot project to manage stray dog populations humanely and reduce dog bite cases in urban areas.
- ★ The sanctuary will house and care for stray dogs, aiming to balance public safety with animal welfare.
- ★ The initiative was inaugurated by Sanjeev Arora, Punjab Cabinet Minister for Local Government, highlighting the government's commitment to responsible urban governance and humane treatment of animals.
- ★ The facility will operate in strict compliance with Supreme Court guidelines and Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, focusing on sterilisation, vaccination, and controlled relocation.
- ★ The pilot project will assess operational effectiveness, with plans to replicate the model across Punjab based on performance data.
- ★ The sanctuary represents a structured, legal, and compassionate approach to stray dog management and could serve as a template for other states facing similar urban animal challenges.

Andhra Pradesh to Get New Spaceport at Hope Island

- ★ Andhra Pradesh CM N. Chandrababu Naidu announced a new spaceport at Hope Island under the Space City initiative to support private and commercial launch missions.
- ★ The facility will focus on small and medium-lift launch vehicles and complement existing national launch centres.
- ★ With this, India's spaceport network will include Satish Dhawan Space Centre (Sriharikota), Kulasekharapatnam SSLV Launch Complex, and Hope Island for different mission profiles.
- ★ The project diversifies launch capabilities, reduces dependence on a single site, and enhances efficiency for multiple types of missions.
- ★ It encourages private sector participation, supporting startups and companies in space technology and catering to the rising demand for small satellite launches.
- ★ Hope Island's location on India's eastern coastline provides an advantage for eastward launches, leveraging Earth's rotation for fuel efficiency.
- ★ The island is tadpole-shaped, off Kakinada in the Bay of Bengal, formed from Koringa River sediments, with its northern tip overlooking Kakinada Harbour.

- ★ It is ecologically important as a nesting ground for Olive Ridley turtles and is adjacent to the Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary.
- ★ The spaceport will strengthen India's commercial space ecosystem, support private launch missions, and maintain ecological balance.

Assam Government Announces Monthly Financial Assistance for Research Scholars

- ★ The Government of Assam announced a monthly financial assistance scheme for research scholars under the Atal Vichal Agrabami Assam programme.
- ★ The scheme will be launched on February 11, 2026.
- ★ ₹25,000 per month will be provided to regular research scholars.
- ★ ₹40,000 per month will be provided to Divyang research scholars, ensuring inclusive higher education support.
- ★ The scheme is applicable to scholars enrolled in universities and higher education institutions across Assam.
- ★ The initiative aims to reduce financial stress, allowing scholars to focus on quality research and academic excellence.
- ★ The announcement was made by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who described it as a transformative step for Assam's academic ecosystem.
- ★ The scheme focuses on empowering young talent, promoting high-quality and interdisciplinary research, and strengthening Assam as a knowledge-driven economy.
- ★ Higher financial support for Divyang scholars highlights the government's commitment to inclusive growth and social justice.
- ★ The assistance will help scholars meet expenses related to research materials, fieldwork, data collection, and living costs.
- ★ It is expected to encourage long-term and in-depth research projects and improve overall research productivity.
- ★ The scheme forms part of Assam's broader education reform agenda, complementing initiatives in skill development and industry-academia collaboration.
- ★ It aligns with national priorities of research, innovation, and self-reliance, while helping attract and retain research talent within the state.

Rajasthan To Develop Alwar Biological Park in NCR Region

- ★ Rajasthan Government has planned a new Biological Park in Alwar district, which will become the first biological park of its kind in the National Capital Region (NCR).
- ★ The park will be developed in the Kati Ghati-Jaisamand area of Alwar and will cover around 100 hectares of land.
- ★ 30% area will be developed as a zoo, while the remaining 70% will be maintained as green and natural forest space to ensure an eco-friendly environment.
- ★ The biological park will house over 400 wild animals belonging to 81 species, including lions, cheetahs, Indian tiger species and African giraffes.

- ★ A key attraction will be the availability of lion safari, tiger safari and herbivore safari at a single location, a first-of-its-kind feature in the NCR region.
- ★ A high-tech animal rescue centre will be set up inside the park, developed on the lines of the Gir National Park rescue facility in Gujarat.
- ★ The park will also include a modern veterinary hospital with advanced medical facilities and a dedicated team of wildlife doctors and forest officials.
- ★ A butterfly park will be developed within the complex to showcase different butterfly species and enhance educational and ecological awareness.
- ★ Animals will be sourced from around 25 zoos across India, with transfers to be carried out in a phased and regulated manner after approvals.
- ★ A Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been prepared, and the project will commence after clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- ★ The Alwar Biological Park is expected to boost wildlife conservation, eco-tourism and regional development while strengthening Rajasthan's position in sustainable tourism and biodiversity protection.

India Notifies GEI Targets Under Carbon Credit Trading Scheme

- ★ Government of India notified Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensity (GEI) targets in January 2026 for additional carbon-intensive sectors under the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS).
- ★ 208 new obligated entities have been brought under the compliance framework, expanding coverage of the Indian Carbon Market (ICM).
- ★ With this notification, the total number of obligated entities has increased to 490, strengthening India's industrial decarbonisation framework.
- ★ Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensity (GEI) refers to emissions per unit of output, focusing on efficiency improvement rather than absolute emission cuts.
- ★ GEI-based targets allow industrial growth while reducing carbon footprint, making them suitable for developing economies like India.
- ★ The move encourages adoption of cleaner technologies, energy efficiency measures, and sustainable production practices in emission-intensive industries.
- ★ The notification was issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the nodal ministry for climate policy and emission regulation.
- ★ Under CCTS, entities that exceed GEI targets earn carbon credits, while those failing to meet targets must purchase credits, ensuring compliance through a market-based mechanism.
- ★ One carbon credit represents reduction or removal of one tonne of CO₂ equivalent, creating financial incentives for emission reduction.
- ★ Expansion of obligated entities will improve market liquidity, credibility, and effectiveness of the Indian Carbon Market.
- ★ For industries, the scheme increases short-term compliance responsibility but offers long-term benefits through efficiency gains, innovation, and access to carbon finance.

- ★ Overall, the notification strengthens India's climate commitments, supports industrial decarbonisation, and aligns environmental sustainability with economic growth.

Gujarat Witnesses Launch of India's First Integrated Private Satellite Manufacturing Unit at Sanand

- ★ Gujarat marked a major milestone in India's space sector with the laying of the foundation stone for India's first integrated private satellite manufacturing unit at Khoraj in Sanand, Gujarat.
- ★ The project represents a significant step in boosting indigenous satellite production and strengthening India's private participation in space technology.
- ★ The advanced satellite manufacturing facility is being set up by Azista Space.
- ★ The plant, named Palmnaro, is designed to enable end-to-end satellite manufacturing under one roof.
- ★ The facility will focus on the production of satellites and high-end electro-optical payloads.
- ★ The project aims to reduce India's dependence on satellite and payload imports and promote local innovation in space technologies.
- ★ The foundation stone laying ceremony was held in the presence of Gujarat's Minister for Science and Technology, Arjun Modhwadia, reflecting strong State Government support for advanced manufacturing and space research.
- ★ Once operational, the Palmnaro plant is expected to generate a large number of high-skilled technical jobs in Gujarat.
- ★ The facility will help attract advanced investments, encourage research and development, and support startups linked to satellite and space technology.
- ★ The project is expected to give a strong boost to high-tech aerospace manufacturing in the state.
- ★ With this development, Gujarat is emerging as a key hub for space and aerospace industries in India.

Punjab Launches Mukhya Mantri Sehat Yojana for Free Cashless Healthcare

- ★ The Punjab Government has introduced the Mukhya Mantri Sehat Yojana to provide free and cashless medical treatment up to ₹10 lakh per family per year.
- ★ The scheme aims to ensure affordable, accessible, and quality healthcare for all residents of Punjab, without any income-based restrictions.
- ★ The scheme was officially launched in Mohali by Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, along with AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal.
- ★ The initiative is expected to bring a major transformation in Punjab's healthcare system, benefiting people across all income groups.
- ★ The scheme will cover all 65 lakh families of Punjab, benefiting nearly three crore people.
- ★ Any resident of Punjab possessing either an Aadhaar card or a Voter ID card is eligible.
- ★ There is no income limit, making it distinct from earlier health insurance schemes.
- ★ Each family is entitled to cashless treatment up to ₹10 lakh annually.

- ★ Treatment can be availed at government hospitals as well as empanelled private hospitals.
- ★ Beneficiaries are not required to pay any money upfront for approved treatments.

Goa Government Signs MoU with Starlink

- ★ The Goa Government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Starlink Satellite Communications, led by Elon Musk, to strengthen digital connectivity, expand internet access in remote areas, enhance disaster resilience, and improve emergency response and smart governance across the state.
- ★ The MoU was signed between the Department of Information Technology, Electronics & Communications (DITE&C), Goa, and Starlink.
- ★ The partnership aims to provide faster, reliable and wider digital access to citizens, public services, and key infrastructure in Goa.
- ★ The partnership will improve public services through better and uninterrupted connectivity.
- ★ It aims to bridge the digital divide by ensuring internet access in remote and underserved areas.
- ★ Improved connectivity is expected to promote tourism, investment, and talent growth, making Goa more digitally competitive.
- ★ Under the MoU, both parties will collaborate to provide digital connectivity in areas with weak or no terrestrial networks, including schools, healthcare centres, and disaster management locations.
- ★ The agreement focuses on strengthening disaster preparedness by ensuring reliable communication systems during emergencies.
- ★ It will support smart governance by enabling technology-driven public services and improved infrastructure development.
- ★ The MoU includes training and capacity building programmes for government staff and local communities to enhance effective use of digital tools.

Uttarakhand Implements Uniform Civil Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026

- ★ The Government of Uttarakhand has implemented the Uniform Civil Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026 after receiving approval from the Governor of Uttarakhand, giving the ordinance immediate legal effect.
- ★ The ordinance has been promulgated under Article 213 of the Constitution of India, which empowers the Governor to issue ordinances when the State Legislature is not in session.
- ★ The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) was originally implemented in Uttarakhand on 27 January 2025, making it the first state in India to enforce a comprehensive Uniform Civil Code.
- ★ The amendment ordinance introduces procedural, administrative and penal reforms to strengthen the implementation of the existing Uniform Civil Code Act, 2024.
- ★ The key objective of the amendments is to remove ambiguities, improve clarity of provisions, and ensure effective enforcement of the Uniform Civil Code across the state.
- ★ The ordinance aligns penal provisions of the UCC with the new Indian criminal laws, ensuring legal consistency and updated punishment mechanisms.

- ★ A major focus of the amendment is on women's empowerment, protection of children's rights, and equality in civil laws applicable to all communities.
- ★ The amendments strengthen registration-related powers, improve the appellate mechanism, and enhance administrative authority for better implementation.
- ★ The Uniform Civil Code has significantly advanced digital governance, especially in marriage registration, by shifting processes from physical offices to online platforms.
- ★ Under the UCC framework, nearly 100 percent marriage registrations are now conducted online through document uploads and video-based verification of couples and witnesses.
- ★ Within one year of UCC implementation, more than five lakh marriages have been registered digitally, with marriage certificates issued within an average of five days.

AI Solution 'Pancham' Chatbot to Ensure Direct Digital Connect

- ★ During 77th Republic Day, Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj S. P. Singh Baghel honoured elected Panchayat representatives invited as Special Guests for the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi.
- ★ Several key initiatives and publications were launched, including PANCHAM chatbot, PESA Rankings 2024–25, 17th Gramoday Sankalp magazine, Compendium of Basic Statistics on PRIs–2025, and the Expert Committee Report on Service Delivery at Panchayat Level.
- ★ The Minister highlighted that after ten years, the SVAMITVA scheme tableau will be showcased at the Republic Day Parade.
- ★ He highlighted digital initiatives such as the PANCHAM chatbot, SabhaSaar tool for automated Gram Sabha minutes launched on 15 August 2025, and AI-based village drainage mapping in Varanasi district.
- ★ The Ministry launched PANCHAM – Panchayat Assistance and Messaging Chatbot on 25 January 2026 as a flagship digital initiative.
- ★ PANCHAM is designed to assist Panchayat representatives and functionaries with guidance, workflows, and easy access to governance information.
- ★ It establishes a direct digital connection between the Government of India and over 30 lakh Panchayat representatives and functionaries.
- ★ The chatbot enables two-way communication, faster issue resolution, improved feedback, and better decision-making.
- ★ PANCHAM supports responsive and accountable governance by strengthening grassroots–government coordination.
- ★ The initiative complements existing digital systems, with over 95% of Gram Panchayats already using digital planning and accounting platforms.
- ★ Overall, the initiative reflects the Ministry's focus on digital governance, innovation, and AI-driven empowerment of Panchayats.

New Aadhaar App Dedicated to the Nation

- ★ Minister of State for Commerce and Industry and Electronics and IT Jitin Prasada dedicated the new Aadhaar App to the nation.

- ★ The app has been developed by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).
- ★ It is a next-generation, privacy-first mobile application for Aadhaar number holders.
- ★ The app enables users to securely carry, show, share and verify their Aadhaar digitally.
- ★ The app gives residents greater control, consent and convenience over their identity data.
- ★ The app supports multiple real-life use cases such as hotel check-ins via QR code, optional face verification, age verification for cinema tickets, hospital visitor verification and gig worker verification.
- ★ It includes features like face verification for proof of presence, single-click biometric lock and unlock, and viewing of authentication history.
- ★ A QR-based contact card is provided for easy sharing of contact details.
- ★ The app allows management of up to five Aadhaar profiles on one device, enabling the concept of “One Family – One App”.
- ★ Users can update their address and registered mobile number through the app, with more services planned.
- ★ Residents can share only required identity fields through customised QR codes generated by requesting entities.
- ★ Aadhaar numbers are not stored by verifiers and only digitally signed credentials are shared.
- ★ The app aligns with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act by ensuring data minimisation.
- ★ The launch reinforces India’s digital public infrastructure vision of being resident-centric, inclusive and trust-based.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Syria Introduces New Banknote Series Effective January 1, 2026

- ★ Syria unveiled a new series of banknotes at a ceremony in Damascus, led by President Ahmed al-Sharaa and Central Bank Governor Abdul Qadir Husrieh.
- ★ The new Syrian currency (SYP) will be issued in denominations ranging from 10 to 500 pounds.
- ★ The new banknotes will enter circulation from January 1, 2026.
- ★ Redenomination reform involves dropping two zeros, where 10,000 old SYP equals 100 new SYP, aimed at easing hyperinflation pressures.
- ★ The redenomination does not change purchasing power, ensuring price neutrality for citizens.
- ★ All bank deposits and electronic balances will automatically convert on Day 1 of the reform.
- ★ The Central Bank of Syria will oversee a nationwide currency exchange through its branch network.
- ★ The design of new notes replaces Assad-era portraits with nature-based symbols.

- ★ Featured motifs include wheat fields, olive branches, orange blossoms, and roses, highlighting agriculture and cultural heritage.
- ★ The new designs symbolize a “new national identity” and economic revival following the 2025 regime change.
- ★ Coins for smaller denominations are planned and will be issued in later phases.
- ★ During the currency transition period, old and new banknotes will coexist for about 90 days.

India and Bangladesh Start Joint Water Measurement as Ganges Water Sharing Treaty Nears Expiry

- ★ India and Bangladesh have initiated joint water measurement on the Padma and Ganga rivers as the 30-year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty enters its final year.
- ★ The water measurement exercise is being conducted 3,500 feet upstream of the Hardinge Bridge on the Padma River in Bangladesh and at the Farakka point on the Ganga River in India.
- ★ The initiative aims to generate accurate, jointly verified river-flow data, which is critical for effective treaty implementation and for future negotiations between the two countries.
- ★ The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, signed in 1996, governs the sharing of dry-season flows of the Ganga/Padma rivers and is scheduled to expire in December 2026, with renewal discussions already underway between India and Bangladesh.

Bulgaria Switches to Euro as Official Currency Effective January 1, 2026

- ★ Bulgaria adopted the Euro (EUR) as its official currency from January 1, 2026, replacing the Bulgarian lev (BGN) after approval by the Council of the European Union (EU) on July 8, 2025, confirming compliance with all Maastricht convergence criteria.
- ★ The irrevocable conversion rate was fixed at 1 EUR = 1.95583 BGN, ensuring a smooth and legally binding transition from the national currency to the euro.
- ★ With this move, Bulgaria became the 21st member of the Eurozone, marking a significant step toward deeper economic integration with the European Union.
- ★ During January 2026, both BGN and EUR will be accepted for payments across Bulgaria, but change will be given only in euros, facilitating a gradual transition for citizens and businesses.
- ★ From February 1, 2026, the euro becomes the sole legal tender, and the Bulgarian lev will be completely withdrawn from daily circulation, completing the currency changeover.
- ★ The Bulgarian National Bank (BNB) has joined the Eurosystem, integrating into the European Central Bank (ECB) framework, strengthening monetary coordination.
- ★ As a result, Bulgarian banks will come under the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM), enhancing banking supervision, financial stability, and regulatory oversight.

Union Minister Announces Zero-Duty on All Australian Tariff Lines for Indian Exports from 1 January 2026

- ★ Union Minister Piyush Goyal announced that 100% of Australian tariff lines will become zero-duty for Indian exports from 1 January 2026, providing a major boost to India's export competitiveness.

- ★ The move is expected to create new market opportunities for labour-intensive sectors, significantly benefiting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), farmers, and workers.
- ★ The announcement coincided with the third anniversary of the India–Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), which came into force on 29 December 2022.
- ★ Over the past three years, ECTA has contributed to sustained export growth, enhanced market access, and stronger supply-chain resilience, supporting Indian exporters, MSMEs, farmers, and workers.
- ★ As a result of improved trade ties, India's exports to Australia increased by 8% in 2024–25, helping to improve India's trade balance, making the development important for economy, trade, and current affairs examinations.

European Union Leaders Likely to Be Chief Guests at India's Republic Day 2026

- ★ India's Republic Day celebrations on 26th January 2026 are expected to have strong diplomatic significance, with European Union (EU) leaders likely to attend as Chief Guests.
- ★ As per media reports, the European Union has officially accepted India's invitation, highlighting the growing importance of the India–EU Strategic Partnership amid changing global economic and geopolitical conditions.
- ★ The expected Chief Guests include Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and António Costa, President of the European Council.
- ★ Their joint presence reflects the EU's identity as a unified political and economic bloc, rather than representation by individual member countries.
- ★ Ursula von der Leyen has led major EU initiatives such as the European Green Deal and the Competitiveness Compass, aimed at enhancing the EU's economic resilience in the face of competition from the United States and China.
- ★ António Costa, who assumed office as President of the European Council in 2024, plays a central role in coordinating EU summits and building diplomatic consensus among member states, drawing on his experience as former Prime Minister of Portugal.
- ★ The visit of EU leaders is expected to coincide with the India–EU Summit, tentatively scheduled for 27th January 2026, though official confirmation is awaited.
- ★ The summit would come at a crucial time as India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations have resumed after a prolonged pause.
- ★ The renewed FTA talks focus on market access, services, investment, and supply-chain resilience.
- ★ EU Trade and Economic Security Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič, who visited India in December 2025, played a key role in reviving and accelerating negotiations.
- ★ The presence of top EU leadership during Republic Day could act as a political push toward a breakthrough in FTA talks.

China Commissions Upgraded Guided Missile Destroyer

- ★ China has commissioned a new upgraded guided missile destroyer as part of its rapid naval expansion to narrow the gap with United States maritime power.

- ★ The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) inducted the Type 052D destroyer "Loudi", reflecting China's focus on enhancing blue-water combat capabilities amid strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific.
- ★ The Type 052D class is considered the backbone of China's modern surface fleet, with the "Loudi" entering active service to strengthen naval modernization.
- ★ The destroyer incorporates a new system architecture with upgrades in radar, weapons, and networking capabilities, enhancing air defence, anti-surface warfare, and task force coordination.
- ★ Type 052D destroyers are central to China's plan to operate carrier strike groups and conduct sustained operations far from its coastline.
- ★ The warships are equipped with phased-array radar, vertical launch systems, and can deploy surface-to-air, anti-ship, and land-attack missiles.
- ★ The induction of upgraded variants indicates continuous design refinement based on operational experience.
- ★ China's accelerating shipbuilding programme aims to match and challenge the United States Navy, emphasizing network-centric warfare, fleet integration, and high-intensity maritime operations.
- ★ The commissioning of "Loudi" highlights Beijing's priority on advanced surface combatants and influences the regional balance of power in Asian and global waters.

India Launches e-Production Investment Business Visa (e-B-4) for Chinese Nationals

- ★ India introduced a new electronic business visa category e-B-4 Visa for Chinese nationals to facilitate structured and legitimate business engagement.
- ★ The move aims to simplify business travel, support production and investment-related activities, and gradually normalise India-China people-to-people exchanges.
- ★ The e-B-4 Visa can be applied entirely online, without visiting the embassy.
- ★ It is specifically meant for production, investment, technical and industrial business activities, not for general commercial visits.
 - Processing Time: Around 45–50 days.
 - Maximum Stay: Up to 6 months in India.
- ★ Permitted activities include installation and commissioning of equipment, plant setup, IT and ERP systems ramp-up, staff training, quality checks, maintenance, supply chain development, vendor empanelment, and senior management visits.
- ★ Applications can be submitted through the Indian e-Visa portal (Bureau of Immigration).
- ★ Indian companies inviting Chinese nationals may also register through DPIIT's National Single Window System (NSWS) for coordinated processing and regulatory oversight.

Pakistan Successfully Tests Indigenous 'Taimoor' Air-Launched Cruise Missile

- ★ Pakistan Air Force (PAF) successfully conducted a flight test of the indigenously developed Taimoor Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) during a live-trial exercise.

- ★ The Taimoor ALCM was launched from a Mirage IIIE fighter aircraft, demonstrating Pakistan's operational air-launch capability.
- ★ The missile is developed by Pakistan's Air Weapons Complex, reflecting indigenous defence manufacturing efforts.
- ★ Taimoor is a turbojet-powered, subsonic cruise missile, capable of engaging both land and sea targets.
- ★ It carries a conventional high-explosive warhead, optimized for precision strikes against defended infrastructure.
- ★ The missile has an operational range of approximately 600 kilometres (km), enabling long-distance precision attacks.
- ★ It is equipped with a state-of-the-art navigation and guidance system, ensuring high accuracy.
- ★ The missile can operate at very low altitudes, enhancing its ability to evade enemy air defence and missile interception systems.

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- ★ Taimoor is a turbojet-powered, subsonic cruise missile, capable of engaging both land and sea targets.

- ★ It carries a conventional high-explosive warhead, optimized for precision strikes against defended infrastructure.
- ★ The missile has an operational range of approximately 600 kilometres (km), enabling long-distance precision attacks.
- ★ It is equipped with a state-of-the-art navigation and guidance system, ensuring high accuracy.
- ★ The missile can operate at very low altitudes, enhancing its ability to evade enemy air defence and missile interception systems.

UN General Assembly Proclaims 2026 as International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

- ★ The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) declared 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026) during its 76th session held in New York, USA.
- ★ IYRP 2026 aims to raise global awareness about the importance of rangelands and pastoralist communities and promote sustainable management practices and secure livelihoods.
- ★ The UNGA resolution for IYRP was adopted on 28 February 2022, initiated by Mongolia and supported by 60 UN Member States.
- ★ The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been designated as the lead implementing agency, working in collaboration with international and national stakeholders.
- ★ Key objectives of IYRP 2026 include sharing traditional pastoralist knowledge, encouraging innovation, building partnerships, and supporting policy frameworks for sustainable rangelands.
- ★ Rangelands cover nearly 50% of Earth's land surface and support over 2 billion people and more than 50% of the world's livestock.
- ★ These ecosystems are crucial for biodiversity conservation, ecosystem regulation, and enhancing climate resilience, making them vital for global environmental sustainability.

India Launches Logo and Website for BRICS Presidency 2026

- ★ India has officially begun preparations for its BRICS Presidency 2026 by launching the official logo and dedicated website.
- ★ The announcement was made by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, marking the formal start of India's chairship preparations.
- ★ The move reflects India's vision for a people-centric, inclusive and development-oriented presidency amid rising global uncertainty.
- ★ India's BRICS Presidency 2026 aims to harness the collective potential of BRICS nations for global welfare and shared development.
- ★ According to S. Jaishankar, India will assume the chairship at a significant milestone, as BRICS completes 20 years in 2026.
- ★ Over time, BRICS has evolved into a major co-operation platform for emerging markets and developing economies.
- ★ India's approach will focus on people-centric development, dialogue and practical co-operation, while adapting to changing global realities and expanded BRICS membership.

- ★ The theme of India's BRICS Presidency 2026 is "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Co-operation and Sustainability".
- ★ The theme highlights India's belief that collective co-operation can address shared global challenges in an inclusive and balanced manner.
- ★ Jaishankar stated that India's approach is inspired by the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and follows a humanity-first philosophy.
- ★ Key focus areas include development for all, capacity building, promotion of innovation and long-term sustainability across member countries.
- ★ The BRICS 2026 logo symbolises unity in diversity and blends tradition with modernity.
- ★ The petals of the logo incorporate the colours of all BRICS member countries, representing equality, shared purpose and mutual respect.
- ★ According to Jaishankar, the logo reflects how BRICS derives strength from the collective contributions of its members while respecting distinct identities.

IGGEFIL Approves First Overseas Green Energy Loan for Solar Power Project in Zambia

- ★ IREDA Global Green Energy Finance IFSC Limited (IGGEFIL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA), has sanctioned its first international green energy loan.
- ★ The loan amount sanctioned is USD 22.5 million to Swarna Solar Limited (SSL).
- ★ The loan is for the development of a 100 Megawatt (MW) Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Power Project.
- ★ The solar project will be set up in Serenje District, Central Province of Zambia.
- ★ This sanction marks IGGEFIL's first overseas loan since its incorporation at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- ★ Operating from GIFT City enables access to foreign-currency loans, which helps in reducing hedging costs and improving global competitiveness.
- ★ The loan approval aims to leverage competitive international capital for global renewable energy development.
- ★ The initiative positions IREDA as a global catalyst for clean energy financing.
- ★ The move is aligned with the Government of India's (GoI) vision of promoting cross-border investments in renewable energy.

Telangana Explores UAE Partnership for Bharat Future City

- ★ Telangana and the UAE agreed to explore co-operation for Bharat Future City during the World Economic Forum 2026.
- ★ Bharat Future City is planned as India's first net-zero greenfield smart city, designed to be a global urban and economic centre with a focus on sustainability, smart infrastructure, and innovation.

- ★ The UAE-Telangana discussions were held between Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri, UAE Minister of Economy and Tourism, and A Revanth Reddy, Telangana CM, highlighting strategic investment and partnership opportunities.
- ★ The project is a key pillar of Telangana Rising 2047, aiming to transform Telangana into a \$3 trillion economy by 2047 through infrastructure-led and innovation-driven development.
- ★ Several global and Indian companies are already associated, including Marubeni, Sembcorp, and Reliance Group's Vantara, showcasing strong investor confidence.
- ★ A joint task force was proposed for faster implementation, along with a UAE-Telangana food cluster collaboration to support rural and agriculture-based economic growth.
- ★ Telangana also engaged with other international partners, including Saudi Expertise for skills training at Young India Skills University and the Israel Innovation Authority for projects in agriculture, AI, climate tech, and startups.
- ★ The initiative reflects Telangana's strategy for global engagement, urban transformation, and inclusive economic growth.

India Delivers Cancer Medicines to Afghanistan as Humanitarian Medical Aid

- ★ India delivered 7.5 tonnes of life-saving cancer medicines to Kabul, reinforcing its humanitarian support to the people of Afghanistan, particularly in the health sector.
- ★ The assistance was confirmed by the Ministry of External Affairs and forms part of India's ongoing humanitarian outreach to Afghanistan.
- ★ Cancer patients in Afghanistan face severe challenges due to shortages of medicines, weak healthcare infrastructure, and high treatment costs, making external medical support critical.
- ★ The consignment aims to ensure continuity of cancer treatment, prevent therapy interruptions, and save lives of vulnerable patients dependent on essential oncology drugs.
- ★ India reiterated its commitment to the Afghan people irrespective of political developments, focusing on health, food security, and essential humanitarian needs.
- ★ The medical aid reflects India's "people-first diplomacy", prioritising humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected and fragile regions.
- ★ Afghanistan's healthcare system remains under strain due to prolonged conflict and economic difficulties, with cancer patients among the worst affected because of the need for specialised and long-term treatment.
- ★ India's support helps bridge immediate gaps in medical supplies, providing relief to hospitals and healthcare providers in Kabul and surrounding regions.

US President Launches Board of Peace Initiative at Davos to Promote Global Stability

- ★ Donald Trump, President of the United States, officially launched the Board of Peace initiative at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, aimed at promoting global geopolitical stability.
- ★ The Board of Peace will work in coordination with the United Nations and other international partners to resolve global conflicts.

- ★ The initiative is linked to Trump's second-phase peace plan for Gaza, where the board is expected to oversee reconstruction and stability efforts.
- ★ Trump proposed that participating countries contribute at least \$1 billion each towards Gaza's reconstruction, raising questions about funding and governance.
- ★ Around 35 countries, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Turkey, and Belarus, have agreed to join the initiative.
- ★ France declined, the UK is not joining at present, China has not clarified its position, and Russia is studying the proposal.
- ★ India has opted for a cautious "wait and watch" approach, choosing to stay away from the Board of Peace despite an invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- ★ The Board of Peace is chaired by Donald Trump and includes prominent figures such as Jared Kushner, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

United States Formally Exits World Health Organization

- ★ The United States (US) has officially finalised its withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO), one year after President Donald Trump announced the decision, ending America's 78-year membership since WHO's founding in 1948.
- ★ Despite the announcement, the withdrawal remains financially incomplete as the US owes over USD 130 million, with WHO officials stating unpaid 2024 and 2025 dues totalling about USD 278 million.
- ★ As per WHO bylaws, a country must give one-year advance notice and clear all outstanding dues before withdrawal becomes fully effective.
- ★ The Trump administration cited WHO's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, failure to implement urgent reforms, and alleged political bias and lack of independence, particularly regarding China's role, as key reasons for exiting.
- ★ The United States previously contributed nearly 20% of WHO's operational budget, making it the largest single contributor to the organisation.
- ★ The US State Department clarified that no further payments would be made before withdrawal, arguing that the cost to US taxpayers and economy outweighed benefits due to WHO's pandemic response.
- ★ Donald Trump had earlier attempted to withdraw from WHO during his first presidential term, but the move was reversed by President Joe Biden on his first day in office in 2020.
- ★ The United States is the only country to have withdrawn from WHO since its establishment, highlighting the exceptional nature of the decision.

Brazilian Play Passado Presente Zenturo to Make International Debut in India and Russia in 2026

- ★ The Brazilian theatre production Passado Presente Zenturo was scheduled for its international debut in 2026, with performances in India and Russia, marking a major milestone for Brazil's contemporary theatre.

- ★ The play was selected for the 25th Bharat Rang Mahotsav, one of the world's leading theatre festivals, organised by the National School of Drama (NSD) under the Ministry of Culture, India.
- ★ During the Indian leg, the production was staged in Bengaluru on 5 February 2026 and New Delhi on 7 February 2026.
- ★ After its India tour, the play was set to represent Brazil at the 5th GITIS FEST in Moscow in April 2026, enhancing international cultural exchange.
- ★ The production was directed by André Haidamus, featured a cast of ten performers, with lighting by Camila Andrade and sound/video design by Cássio Gondim.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

DRDO Conducts Successful Flight Test of 120 km Range Pinaka Rocket

- ★ The maiden flight test of the Pinaka Long Range Guided Rocket (LRGR-120) was successfully conducted at the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha, on 29 December 2025.
- ★ The LRGR-120 was tested for its maximum range of 120 kilometres and successfully demonstrated all planned in-flight manoeuvres.
- ★ The rocket impacted the designated target with textbook precision, validating its high accuracy and guidance capability.
- ★ The entire flight trajectory of the LRGR-120 was continuously monitored by deployed range instruments.
- ★ The rocket was launched from the in-service Pinaka launcher, proving its compatibility with multiple Pinaka variants from the same launch platform.
- ★ The successful test demonstrated the versatility of the Pinaka weapon system, enabling the launch of guided rockets of different ranges using a single launcher.
- ★ The LRGR-120 has been designed by the Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE), a laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- ★ The development was carried out in association with the High Energy Materials Research Laboratory (HEMRL), with support from the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) and Research Centre Imarat (RCI).
- ★ The flight trial was coordinated by the Integrated Test Range (ITR) and the Proof and Experimental Establishment (P&EE).

Delhi Government Partners with IIT Kanpur

- ★ The Delhi Government, in collaboration with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, will implement an Intelligent Grievance Monitoring System (IGMS) to enhance transparent and efficient governance.
- ★ The IGMS is an AI- and ML-powered platform designed to integrate multiple grievance portals into a single unified dashboard, addressing issues like delays, duplication, and fragmented oversight.

- ★ The system will connect platforms such as PGMS (Public Grievance Management System), LG Listening Post, Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS), and other portals via secure APIs.
- ★ IIT Kanpur will be responsible for system integration, cybersecurity audits (VAPT - Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Testing), and ongoing maintenance of the IGMS platform.
- ★ Key features of the platform include Semantic Search to identify complaints by meaning, Root Cause Analysis for recurring issues, and Automatic Routing to the correct departments.
- ★ The initiative aims to strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms and ensure effective citizen-centric governance in Delhi.

China Sets World Record: Superconducting Maglev Hits 700 km/h in Just 2 Seconds

- ★ China set a new world record by accelerating a superconducting electric maglev train to 700 km/h in just 2 seconds, marking the fastest maglev acceleration test ever conducted.
- ★ The experiment was conducted by researchers at the National University of Defence Technology on a 400-metre maglev test track, where a 1,000-kg test vehicle was successfully accelerated and brought to a safe stop.
- ★ The maglev system uses superconducting magnetic levitation, enabling the train to float above the track without physical contact, while electromagnetic acceleration provides propulsion with negligible friction.
- ★ The project represents over 10 years of sustained research; earlier in January 2025, the same system achieved 648 km/h, and about 30 years ago, the university developed China's first manned single-bogie maglev, making China the third country in the world to master maglev technology.

Indian Air Force Partnered with IIT Madras

- ★ The Indian Air Force (IAF) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) to jointly develop an indigenous digital communication system for airborne platforms.
- ★ The collaboration combines the operational experience of the Indian Air Force with the technical and research expertise of IIT Madras.
- ★ The project will focus on the design and development of secure digital communication tools for airborne environments.
- ★ Key areas include networking algorithms, encryption technologies, secure and fast data exchange, and systems capable of operating under high mobility and changing operational conditions.
- ★ The proposed system aims to support secure, resilient and real-time communication, which is critical for modern airborne missions and network-centric warfare.
- ★ It will enable continuous information exchange between aircraft, sensors and command centres.
- ★ The initiative is expected to reduce India's dependence on imported defence communication equipment and strengthen technological sovereignty.

- ★ The collaboration will lead to the development of prototypes, which will be tested and deployed within existing defence infrastructure.
- ★ The partnership also reflects IIT Madras' expanding role in defence research, including areas such as aerospace, artificial intelligence, communication systems and cybersecurity, contributing to India's defence industrial base.

Delhi Government Partners with Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

- ★ The Delhi Government, in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, will implement an Intelligent Grievance Monitoring System, aimed at improving speed, transparency, and accountability in public service delivery through artificial intelligence and data analytics.
- ★ The new system will integrate multiple grievance portals into a single unified dashboard, enabling holistic monitoring and effective resolution of citizen complaints.
- ★ The new system seeks to address these challenges by centralising grievance data.
- ★ The Intelligent Grievance Monitoring System is an artificial intelligence and machine learning based platform designed to consolidate, analyse, and monitor public grievances across departments, with the objective of improving resolution timelines and strengthening public trust in governance.
- ★ All grievances from platforms such as the Public Grievance Management System, Lieutenant Governor Listening Post, Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System, and other departmental portals will be visible on one integrated dashboard.
- ★ The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur will be responsible for system integration through secure Application Programming Interfaces, cybersecurity audits, vulnerability assessment and penetration testing, and long-term technical maintenance, ensuring platform security and reliability.
- ★ The initiative is expected to reduce delays, improve coordination among departments, enhance efficiency in grievance redressal, and promote accountable governance in Delhi.

ISRO Successfully Tests Enhanced SSLV Third Stage (SS3) at Sriharikota

- ★ Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully conducted a static ground test of the enhanced 3rd stage (SS3) of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) at the Solid Motor Static Test Facility, Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.
- ★ SSLV is a three-stage, all-solid launch vehicle designed for quick, on-demand missions and to support industrial-scale production of launch services.
- ★ During the test, the enhanced SS3 motor was fired for 108 seconds, with all performance parameters closely matching pre-test predictions.
- ★ The motor was equipped with around 233 sensors to monitor pressure, thrust, temperature, vibration, and the performance of control electronics.
- ★ Following the successful test, the enhanced SS3 stage has qualified for induction into flight missions.
- ★ The performance upgrades, including a new carbon-epoxy motor case, have increased SSLV payload capacity by about 90 kg.

- ★ Additional improvements such as an upgraded igniter and nozzle system have further enhanced the efficiency, reliability, and overall performance of the SSLV.

NTPC Signs MoA with Gujarat Cancer and Research Institute

- ★ NTPC Limited – Western Region–I Headquarters, Mumbai signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the Gujarat Cancer and Research Institute (GCRI) for the upgradation of radiotherapy services.
- ★ Under this Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative, NTPC has sanctioned ₹23.16 crore for upgrading radiotherapy facilities at the Siddhpur Satellite Centre of GCRI, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.
- ★ The financial support will be utilized for the procurement and installation of a high-energy Linear Accelerator (LINAC).
- ★ The installation of the LINAC will significantly enhance advanced cancer treatment capabilities and improve access to quality radiotherapy services for patients in the region.
- ★ The initiative reinforces NTPC's commitment to inclusive development and its continued focus on strengthening critical healthcare infrastructure through impact-driven CSR interventions.

IIT Madras Unveils Indigenous 3.1 Petaflop Supercomputer 'Param Shakti'

- ★ Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) has launched Param Shakti, an indigenously developed supercomputing system with a computing capacity of 3.1 petaflops.
- ★ Param Shakti can perform over 3.1 quadrillion calculations per second, placing it among India's most powerful supercomputers.
- ★ The supercomputer will significantly enhance advanced research in areas such as aerospace, materials science, climate modelling, drug discovery, and advanced manufacturing by drastically reducing computation time.
- ★ Param Shakti has been built entirely in India by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) using the RUDRA server series and operates on open-source software.
- ★ The system functions as part of the Param Rudra supercomputing cluster, supported by integrated power, cooling, and data-centre infrastructure.
- ★ The project is funded under the National Supercomputing Mission (NSM), jointly implemented by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

Tamil Nadu Signs MoU with Sarvam AI to Establish Sovereign AI Park

- ★ The Tamil Nadu Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sarvam AI to set up a full-stack Sovereign AI Park.
- ★ The project involves an initial investment of ₹10,000 crore and is expected to generate around 1,000 high-skilled jobs in advanced computing and artificial intelligence research.
- ★ The Sovereign AI Park will function as a purpose-built AI district, integrating model development labs, innovation clusters, secure data frameworks, high-end compute infrastructure, and a dedicated Institute for AI in Governance.

- ★ Sarvam AI co-founder Pratyush Kumar stated that the project aims to move AI from experimentation to real-world national-scale impact in India.
- ★ The investment will be primarily focused on compute infrastructure and graphics processing units (GPUs).
- ★ The platform will support large-scale AI applications across education, healthcare, agriculture, and citizen services, with academia playing a key role.
- ★ A large data centre will be established near the IIT Madras campus in Chennai, with public data digitised for evidence-based policymaking, outcome evaluation, and private sector usage.
- ★ A plot of land near IIT Madras Research Park has already been identified for the project.
- ★ IIT Madras Director V. Kamakoti stated that artificial intelligence will define the next generation of jobs, similar to how manufacturing and IT shaped earlier generations.
- ★ These efforts aim to make future AI systems in Tamil Nadu locally rooted, inclusive, and accurate.
- ★ The project's ₹10,000 crore investment is nearly equivalent to the Central Government's ₹10,371 crore outlay under the IndiaAI Mission.

Apple Partners with Google to Integrate Gemini AI

- ★ Apple has signed a multi-year deal with Google to use Google's Gemini AI models to power its Apple Foundation Models.
- ★ The Apple Foundation Models will drive future Apple Intelligence features, including the revamped Siri.
- ★ Apple chose Gemini AI because it offers the most capable AI foundation, while ensuring privacy through on-device processing and Apple's Private Cloud Compute (PCC).
- ★ Previously, Apple had partnered with OpenAI's ChatGPT to handle complex Siri queries, but it is now unclear how this partnership will continue after Gemini takes over Siri's core intelligence.
- ★ The new AI-powered Siri, expected with iOS 26.4 in March 2026, will be able to understand personal context from emails, messages, and calendars to provide customised answers.

World's First Global Ice Vault Launched in Antarctica

- ★ Scientists have inaugurated the world's first global ice vault in Antarctica to preserve mountain ice core samples threatened by rapid glacier melting due to global warming.
- ★ The initiative is led by the Ice Memory Foundation, a consortium of European research institutions, aimed at safeguarding ice cores as long-term climate archives for future generations.
- ★ The first ice core samples were extracted from Mont Blanc (France) and Grand Combin (Switzerland).
- ★ These ice cores are being stored at Concordia Station, Antarctica, maintained at a constant temperature of around -52°C , ensuring long-term preservation.
- ★ The Ice Memory Project was launched in 2015 and plans to collect and store ice cores from around 10 glaciers worldwide, with more glaciers to be added in the coming years.
- ★ The global ice vault is inspired by the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, serving as a global scientific resource amid accelerating glacier disappearance.

- ★ Since 2000, glaciers have witnessed an estimated 39% regional loss and 5% global loss, highlighting the urgency of climate preservation

Galgotias University Inaugurates IIT Mandi Catalyst Satellite Centre in Greater Noida

- ★ Galgotias University, ranked among the world's leading universities by QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) and Times Higher Education (THE), inaugurated the IIT Mandi Catalyst Satellite Centre at its campus in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP).
- ★ The inauguration marks a major milestone in strengthening innovation-driven learning, entrepreneurship, and India's startup ecosystem.
- ★ The centre has been established in collaboration with IIT Mandi, Himachal Pradesh (HP).
- ★ The primary aim of the centre is to support early-stage startups, promote deep-tech innovation, and bridge the gap between research and real-world applications.
- ★ The IIT Mandi Catalyst Satellite Centre will function as an innovation and incubation hub, supporting startups, student entrepreneurs, and joint programmes.
- ★ The hub will provide mentorship, investor access, market linkages, and support for technology commercialisation and acceleration.
- ★ During the event, Galgotias University signed two strategic Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) to strengthen academic and research collaboration.
- ★ The MoUs were signed with National Institute of Technology (NIT), Jamshedpur (Jharkhand) and Jharkhand University of Technology (JUT), Ranchi.
- ★ These partnerships aim to enable joint research initiatives, faculty and student exchange programmes, co-creation of deep-tech startups, access to advanced laboratories, and shared incubation and acceleration programmes.

Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited Partners with Viasat

- ★ BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited) has partnered with Viasat, Inc. (USA) to support the next phase of the Indian Navy's Satellite Communications (SATCOM) upgrade programme.
- ★ The partnership focuses on integrating Viasat's Ka-band satellite systems with BSNL's L-band network, enabling multi-band SATCOM connectivity for the Indian Navy (IN).
- ★ The collaboration aims to enhance coverage, reliability, and secure communication for critical naval operations.
- ★ Viasat will manage the programme through its International Government team under the Communication Services
- ★ BSNL will provide gateway infrastructure, system integration, and strategic support for the naval SATCOM network.
- ★ Viasat's satellite communication equipment has already reached India, with installation scheduled to begin in late January 2026.
- ★ The initiative strengthens India's maritime communication capabilities and supports the modernisation of naval communication infrastructure.

GalaxEye to Launch First Satellite 'Mission Drishti' in Q1 2026

- ★ GalaxEye, an Indian space start-up, is set to launch its first satellite 'Mission Drishti' in the first quarter of 2026, marking a major milestone for India's private space sector.
- ★ Mission Drishti is a multi-sensory Earth observation satellite that combines optical imaging and radar sensing on a single platform, a global first in satellite technology.
- ★ The satellite is India's largest privately developed satellite, highlighting the growing capabilities of private space enterprises in the country.
- ★ It uses GalaxEye's patented SyncFused OptoSAR technology, which fuses optical data and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) to provide all-weather Earth observation, including imaging through cloud cover.
- ★ This advanced technology enables high-reliability, continuous imaging, overcoming limitations of conventional optical-only satellites.
- ★ GalaxEye plans to deploy a constellation of 10 satellites by 2030, enabling near real-time data delivery at scale for global applications.
- ★ The mission aligns with India's push for indigenous space innovation and enhanced Earth observation capabilities under the New Space ecosystem.

NASA Rolls Out Space Launch System (SLS) Rocket

- ★ The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has rolled out its Space Launch System (SLS) rocket to the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center, marking a major milestone in lunar exploration.
- ★ The 322-foot-tall SLS rocket will carry out the first crewed lunar fly-around mission in over 50 years, taking astronauts around the Moon and back on a 10-day journey.
- ★ The mission will include four astronauts: three from NASA – Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, and Christina Koch – and one Canadian astronaut, Jeremy Hansen.
- ★ Christina Koch, holder of the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman (328 days), will be the first female astronaut to embark on a lunar mission.
- ★ If launched successfully in the February 2026 window, this mission will mark humanity's first journey to the Moon since 1972, paving the way for long-term lunar exploration.
- ★ The mission represents a 10-day journey around the Moon and back, highlighting NASA's focus on crewed lunar missions for the first time in half a century.

Zoho Launches New ERP Platform to Serve India's Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

- ★ Zoho Corporation has launched a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platform, targeting India's small and medium enterprises (SMEs).
- ★ The new ERP platform is designed to be affordable, easy-to-deploy, and less consultant-dependent, addressing the underserved SME market.
- ★ Zoho's ERP aims to overcome traditional adoption challenges such as high costs, long implementation cycles, and heavy reliance on consultants.

- ★ The ERP systems remain critical for enterprise operations, but smaller firms in India have limited adoption.
- ★ The ERP platform will initially be rolled out in India, leveraging rapid formalisation and digitisation of businesses, before being introduced in global markets.
- ★ Zoho Corporation is an Indian multinational technology company specializing in cloud-based business software, headquartered in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Microsoft Launches Maia 200 AI Chip to Strengthen Integrated AI Ecosystem

- ★ Microsoft has introduced the second generation of its in-house artificial intelligence processor, “Maia 200”, along with a new suite of AI-focused software tools, strengthening its push to build an integrated AI ecosystem.
- ★ The Maia 200 AI chip builds on Microsoft’s first Maia chip, which was originally introduced in 2023.
- ★ The Maia 200 is manufactured by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) using advanced 3-nanometer (3-nm) process technology.
- ★ The chip incorporates high-bandwidth memory, enhancing its ability to handle data-intensive AI workloads.
- ★ The Maia 200 AI processor is now operational at a Microsoft data centre in Iowa, marking its first live deployment.
- ★ Microsoft has plans to expand deployment of the Maia 200 to additional data-centre facilities.
- ★ Compared to its predecessor, Maia 200 offers higher compute capability, increased memory bandwidth, and better energy efficiency.
- ★ These improvements enable faster and more cost-effective artificial intelligence workloads, making the Maia 200 a key component of Microsoft’s AI infrastructure strategy.

BANKING & FINANCE

India Plans ₹3.84 Lakh Crore Borrowing through Short-Term Treasury Bills in Q4

- ★ The Government of India plans to borrow ₹3.84 lakh crore through short-term Treasury Bills (T-Bills) over 12 weeks in Q4 of the current financial year to meet short-term funding requirements.
- ★ Weekly Treasury Bill auctions will range between ₹29,000 crore and ₹35,000 crore, as stated by the Finance Ministry.
- ★ The planned Q4 borrowing of ₹3.84 lakh crore is ₹10,000 crore lower than the ₹3.94 lakh crore raised in the same quarter of the previous financial year.
- ★ Earlier, the Government had announced a Q3 Treasury Bill auction calendar of ₹2.47 lakh crore, ending 31 December 2025.
- ★ The borrowing programme has been finalised in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

- ★ Treasury Bills (T-Bills) are money market instruments issued by the Government of India as a promissory note with guaranteed repayment at maturity.
- ★ T-Bills are zero-coupon securities, meaning they do not pay interest and are issued at a discount, allowing investors to earn a profit from the difference between purchase price and face value at maturity.
- ★ In India, T-Bills are issued with tenures of 91 days, 182 days, and 364 days, catering to short-term investment needs.
- ★ The minimum investment amount in Treasury Bills is ₹25,000, making them accessible to retail investors, and they can be purchased in multiples of ₹25,000.
- ★ Some Government securities (G-Secs) may start from ₹10,000, providing broader access to small investors.
- ★ T-Bills provide a safe and liquid investment option while supporting the Government's short-term financing and cash management.

RBI Imposes ₹2.40 Lakh Penalty on Valuecorp Securities and Finance Limited

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposed a monetary penalty of ₹2.40 lakh on Valuecorp Securities and Finance Limited.
- ★ The penalty was levied due to non-compliance with RBI regulatory directions.
- ★ The violations related to submission of data to Credit Information Companies (CICs), transfer of loan exposure, and Know Your Customer (KYC) norms.
- ★ The RBI exercised its powers under the Credit Information Companies (Regulation) Act, 2005 and the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 to impose the penalty.
- ★ The central bank found that Valuecorp Securities & Finance Limited failed to furnish customer credit information to CICs as required under regulations.
- ★ The company was also found to have transferred loan exposure to entities not permitted under the applicable RBI guidelines.
- ★ Further findings included a failure to assign Unique Customer Identification Codes (UCICs) and a failure to carry out risk categorisation of its customers.
- ★ Valuecorp Securities and Finance Limited is an Indian non-government public limited company, incorporated in 1991, and headquartered in Mumbai (Fort area).
- ★ The company operates in the securities and financial services sector.

RBI Grants Final Payment Aggregator–Cross Border Authorization to Prosus-Backed Fintech BRISKPE

- ★ BRISKPE, a Prosus-backed fintech, has received final authorisation from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a Payment Aggregator–Cross Border (PA-CB) under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- ★ The authorisation allows both inward and outward cross-border payment flows, positioning BRISKPE as a fully compliant, end-to-end cross-border payments platform for Indian businesses.

- ★ BRISKPE becomes one of India's youngest fintechs specialising in cross-border payments to secure PA-CB authorisation in a short time frame.
- ★ Launched in 2023, BRISKPE provides real-time payment tracking, local virtual accounts, competitive FX, and a digital-first onboarding experience.
- ★ The PA-CB license is mandatory for entities facilitating online cross-border payments for import and export of goods and services.
- ★ This move reinforces the RBI's focus on bringing fintech intermediaries under direct regulatory oversight to ensure compliance and transaction security.

IDFC First Bank Launches 'Gaj', an Invitation-Only Premium Metal Credit Card

- ★ IDFC First Bank has launched 'Gaj', a premium metal credit card offered exclusively on an invitation-only basis for High-Net-Worth Individuals (HNIs).
- ★ The card represents the pinnacle of the bank's Ashva-Mayura-Gaj trilogy, a curated series of premium metal credit cards.
- ★ The design of the card features a twin-elephant motif (Gaj meaning elephant in Sanskrit), symbolizing majesty, wisdom, and stability.
- ★ It carries a joining fee and an annual fee of ₹12,500 plus GST.
- ★ The annual fee is waived upon reaching a milestone of ₹10 lakh in annual spends.
- ★ Cardholders receive 12,500 Reward Points (RP) as a welcome benefit, where 1 RP = ₹1 for travel bookings, effectively offsetting the joining fee.
- ★ A key feature is zero foreign exchange (forex) markup on all international transactions, targeting the "Global Indian"
- ★ The card provides interest-free global ATM cash withdrawals for up to 45 days (subject to a flat transaction fee).
- ★ It offers accelerated rewards of up to 33.33% value-back (50 RP per ₹150) on hotel bookings and 16.67% on flight bookings via the bank's app.
- ★ Travel benefits include complimentary access to 4 domestic (including one guest) and 4 international airport lounges per quarter.
- ★ The card includes a Trip Cancellation Cover of up to ₹50,000 and a Personal Air Accident Cover of ₹1 crore.
- ★ Cardholders are also eligible for a lifetime free 'FIRST Digital' RuPay Credit Card to facilitate UPI payments.

Reserve Bank of India Relaxes Norms for NBFC

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has eased capital adequacy norms for Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) lending to high-quality infrastructure projects through the NBFC (Prudential Norms on Capital Adequacy) Amendment Directions, 2026.
- ★ The RBI has reduced risk weights on such exposures, allowing a 75% risk-weight if the borrower has repaid at least 2% of the sanctioned project debt, compared to the earlier draft requirement of 5–10% repayment.

- ★ A lower 50% risk-weight will apply if the borrower has repaid at least 5% of the sanctioned project debt, relaxed from the earlier draft threshold of 10% or more.
- ★ Lower risk weights reduce the capital that NBFCs must set aside, thereby encouraging lending to operational, lower-risk infrastructure projects.
- ★ A project will be treated as “high-quality” if it has completed at least one year of operations after the Commercial Operation Date (COD), has no breach of material covenants, and the exposure is classified as ‘standard’.
- ★ Project revenues must arise from government or public authority concessions or contracts, with legal protection of rights throughout the concession period, subject to fulfilment of borrower obligations.
- ★ The amended directions will come into effect from April 1, 2026, or earlier if an NBFC opts for full adoption, and aim at better risk alignment, efficient capital allocation, and safer infrastructure financing.
- ★ For exposures that currently enjoy a lower risk weight but would attract a higher risk weight under the new norms, NBFCs may continue with the existing risk weight until the next review or renewal or March 31, 2027, whichever is earlier.

Reserve Bank of India Imposes Nearly ₹27 Crore in Penalties on Banks

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposed nearly ₹27 crore in monetary penalties across 40 instances on banks during calendar year 2025 (CY25) for various regulatory violations.
- ★ Private Sector Banks (PVBs) accounted for the highest penalty burden, paying ₹16.28 crore, which is almost double the amount paid by Public Sector Banks (PSBs).
- ★ Jammu and Kashmir Bank faced the single largest penalty among private banks, amounting to ₹3.31 crore in March 2025 for multiple violations, making it the most penalised bank by value in CY25.
- ★ Public Sector Banks paid total penalties of ₹8.78 crore, with the State Bank of India (₹1.72 crore) being the most penalised PSB, followed by Canara Bank and Indian Bank.
- ★ Small Finance Banks (SFBs) were fined over ₹2.5 crore, led by Jana Small Finance Bank (₹1 crore), mainly for capital structure and shareholding norm violations.
- ★ Foreign banks paid around ₹1.95 crore in penalties, with HSBC (₹66.6 lakh) and Deutsche Bank (₹50 lakh) among the top fined, primarily for KYC, FEMA, and regulatory reporting lapses.
- ★ The most common violations across banks included priority sector lending breaches, improper collateral practices in MSME and agriculture loans, KYC and cyber-security lapses, unauthorised digital transactions, failure to transfer unclaimed deposits to the Depositor Education and Awareness Fund (DEAF), and governance weaknesses.

Ministry Of Finance Issues Rules Allowing 100% FDI In Insurance Sector

- ★ The Ministry of Finance has notified the Indian Insurance Companies (Foreign Investment) Amendment Rules, 2025, aligning regulations with the 100% foreign direct investment (FDI) limit approved by Parliament in December 2025.

- ★ This follows the passage of the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025, which allows 100% FDI in insurance companies, replacing the earlier 74% cap under the Insurance Act, 1938, LIC Act, 1956, and IRDAI Act, 1999.
- ★ Under the new rules, an insurance company with foreign investment must have at least one key leadership position (CEO, MD, or Chairperson) held by a resident Indian citizen.
- ★ The requirement that a majority of directors and key managerial personnel be Indian residents has been removed, simplifying corporate governance norms for foreign-invested insurance companies.
- ★ The notification omits Rule 4A, which earlier required 50% of net profits to be retained in the general reserve if foreign investment exceeded 49% and solvency margins were low, and also prescribed independent director requirements.
- ★ References to FEMA (Transfer or Issue of Security by a Person Resident Outside India) Regulations, 2000 have been replaced with FEMA (Non-Debt Instrument) Rules, 2019, and provisions related to the 74% FDI cap have been updated to reflect the new statutory limit under the Insurance Act, 1938.
- ★ The notification removes three key clauses applicable to insurance companies with foreign investors, including prior IRDAI approval for dividend repatriation, restrictions on payments to foreign group or promoter entities, and specific board/key management composition rules.
- ★ The Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Act, 2025 has amended the Insurance Act, 1938, the Life Insurance Corporation Act, 1956, and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999, enabling full foreign ownership and simplified governance for insurance companies in India.
- ★ The new rules came into force on December 30, 2025, the date of publication in the official gazette, facilitating implementation of the new insurance law.

Reserve Bank of India Launches “RBI Talks: Paisa to Policy” Podcast

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched an official podcast series titled “RBI Talks: Paisa to Policy” to enhance public communication and financial awareness.
- ★ The initiative was announced in the Monetary Policy Statement dated December 6, 2024, as part of RBI’s plan to expand its citizen outreach tools.
- ★ The podcast aims to simplify complex financial and banking topics for the general public, promoting financial literacy, awareness, and inclusion.
- ★ The series is designed to make RBI policies and regulations more accessible, understandable, and citizen-friendly, bridging the gap between policy and people.
- ★ The first episode, titled “Demystifying KYC”, explains the concept and importance of Know Your Customer (KYC) in simple and practical terms.
- ★ Through this initiative, RBI leverages modern digital platforms like podcasts to enhance public understanding of financial regulations and policies.

Ministry of Finance Maintains Small Savings Scheme Interest Rates for Q4 FY26

- ★ The Department of Economic Affairs (DEA–Budget Division) under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) kept interest rates unchanged across all Small Savings Schemes (SSS) for Q4 FY26 (1 Jan–31 Mar 2026).

- ★ This is the 8th consecutive quarter with no change in SSS interest rates; rates were last revised in Q4 FY24.
- ★ The decision covers key schemes including Public Provident Fund (PPF) and Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY).
- ★ **Interest Rates on Small Savings Schemes – Q4 FY26:**
 - Post Office Savings Deposit (POSD): 4.0%
 - 1-Year Post Office Time Deposit (POTD): 6.9%
 - 2-Year POTD: 7.0%
 - 3-Year POTD: 7.1%
 - 5-Year POTD: 7.5%
 - 5-Year Post Office Recurring Deposit (PORD): 6.7%
 - Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP): 7.5% (Maturity: 115 months)
 - Public Provident Fund (PPF): 7.1%
 - Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY): 8.2%
 - National Savings Certificate (NSC): 7.7%
 - Senior Citizen Savings Scheme (SCSS): 8.2%
 - Post Office Monthly Income Scheme (PO-MIS): 7.4%
 - Mahila Samman Savings Certificate (MSSC): 7.5%
- ★ SSS are Government of India (GoI)-backed instruments, aimed at promoting household savings with risk-free returns.

RIIT Sponsored by NHAI Gets AAA (Stable) Rating from CARE Ratings

- ★ Raajmarg Infra Investment Trust (RIIT), sponsored by National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), has received a AAA (Stable) rating for its long-term bank facilities from CARE Ratings Limited.
- ★ The AAA (Stable) rating is the highest credit rating, indicating very strong financial health and extremely low risk of default on debt.
- ★ The Stable outlook suggests that RIIT's credit profile is expected to remain unchanged in the near to medium term.
- ★ The rating reflects the experience, credibility, and track record of NHAI in the roads and highways sector, along with the strategic importance of NHAI's asset monetization programme, which has monetized assets worth around ₹1.43 lakh crore to date.
- ★ RIIT has received SEBI approval (on December 24, 2025) to operate as a Public Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT), enabling the monetization of National Highway assets.
- ★ The Public InvIT provides a safe, long-term investment option, primarily targeting retail and domestic investors, while supporting India's infrastructure growth and sustainable capital formation.
- ★ The InvIT initiative broadens public participation in the National Highway infrastructure development story, strengthening NHAI's asset monetization programme.

Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited Begins Maritime Lending

- ★ Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited (SMFCL), India's first NBFC dedicated to maritime financing, commenced lending operations and sanctioned loans worth around ₹4,300 crore during its 51st Board Meeting held on December 30, 2025.
- ★ With this step, SMFCL formally entered the maritime lending space, in line with the strategy approved by its Board, strengthening India's port and maritime financing ecosystem.
- ★ A major portion of funding includes ₹4,000 crore allocated for a Greenfield Port Project, reaffirming the Government of India's (GoI) commitment to port-led development under the Sagarmala vision.
- ★ Under the same loan tranche, Dredging Corporation of India (DCI) received ₹150 crore, while Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) secured ₹110 crore, aimed at enhancing dredging capacity and indigenous shipbuilding capabilities.
- ★ The SMFCL Board approved a ₹25,000 crore borrowing limit and a ₹8,000 crore lending target for FY 2025-26, outlining its strategic roadmap for maritime sector financing.
- ★ SMFCL, launched in June 2025 (formerly known as Sagarmala Development Company Limited), has been appointed as the nodal agency for the ₹25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund (MDF), positioning it as a key financial pillar for India's maritime infrastructure development.

Asian Development Bank Sanctions ₹4,100 Crore Loan to Telangana

- ★ The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has granted in-principle approval for a ₹4,100 crore (\$500 million) loan to the Telangana Government for Phase-I of the Musi River Development Project.
- ★ The Telangana Government submitted a Preliminary Project Report (PPR) to the Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) seeking ₹3,188 crore under the National River Conservation Plan (NRCP).
- ★ The Musi River Development Project is divided into five zones, with Phase-I covering 21 km of Zone-I, from Osman Sagar (Gandipet) to Bapu Ghat and Himayatsagar to Bapu Ghat, out of a total project length of 55 km.
- ★ The Musi Riverfront Development Corporation Limited (MRDCL), a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) of the Telangana Government, is executing Phase-I.
- ★ Phase-I works are expected to begin after cost estimates finalization by 31 March 2026.
- ★ Key features include Bapu Ghat redevelopment, the Gandhi Sarovar, and the Mahatma Gandhi memorial, aiming to create a major riverfront landmark.
- ★ The project focuses on cultural restoration of temples, mosques, gurudwaras, churches, and the 800-year-old Lord Shiva temple at Manchirevula.
- ★ Infrastructure plans include the Gateway of Hyderabad, a 55-km elevated corridor from Gandipet to Gourella, and a greenfield road connecting the Outer Ring Road.

SEBI Grants In-Principle Approval to Ashika Group

- ★ Ashika Group received in-principle approval from Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to act as a Sponsor and establish Ashika Mutual Fund (MF), enabling the formation of an Asset Management Company (AMC), subject to final registration.

- ★ The approval allows Ashika Mutual Fund to begin preparations for scheme launches, once final SEBI registration is granted.
- ★ Ashika Group, established in 1994, operates as a diversified financial services platform offering Retail and Institutional Broking, Investment Banking and Advisory, Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), Research & Advisory, Global Family Office Services, NBFC operations, and distribution services.

ICICI Bank Introduces Capital Gains Account Scheme Effective 1 January 2026

- ★ ICICI Bank Limited launched the Capital Gains Account Scheme (CGAS), 1988 under the Income Tax (IT) Act, 1961, effective from 1 January 2026, to help taxpayers deposit un-invested long-term capital gains and claim tax exemptions.
- ★ Under CGAS, long-term capital gains or sale proceeds from specified assets can be deposited before the Income Tax Return (ITR) due date to remain eligible for capital gains tax exemption.
- ★ The deposited funds can be parked for up to three years, during which they earn interest at rates similar to savings accounts or term deposits, depending on the account type.
- ★ The proceeds can be reinvested in residential or commercial property, agricultural land, or new capital assets of industrial undertakings located in non-urban areas or Special Economic Zones (SEZs), as per the applicable account category.
- ★ Withdrawals from the CGAS account are allowed only with proof of utilization, with the first withdrawal through Form C, subsequent withdrawals through Form D, and any unutilized balance after three years becoming taxable.
- ★ Type A Account under CGAS functions as a savings account, allows flexible withdrawals only for approved reinvestment purposes, and does not provide cheque book or debit card facilities.
- ★ Type B Account is a fixed-tenure term deposit (FD) available in cumulative and non-cumulative options, requires a minimum deposit of ₹10,000, and offers interest rates comparable to regular fixed deposits.
- ★ The scheme is currently available to resident individuals and Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), with plans to extend access to Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and non-individual entities in the future.
- ★ CGAS accounts can be opened at ICICI Bank branches across India, excluding rural branches, in accordance with CGAS guidelines.
- ★ Several other banks, including HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Yes Bank, and others, are also authorised to offer CGAS services at their non-rural branches.

India's Unified Payments Interface Records Record 21.63 Billion Transactions in December 2025

- ★ India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) recorded an all-time high of 21.63 billion transactions in December 2025, according to National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)
- ★ The total transaction value in December 2025 stood at ₹27.97 lakh crore, compared to 20.47 billion transactions worth ₹26.32 lakh crore in November 2025, showing month-on-month growth.

- ★ On average, about 698 million UPI transactions were processed daily during December, indicating deep penetration of digital payments in India.
- ★ For the calendar year 2025, UPI handled around 228 billion transactions worth nearly ₹300 lakh crore, up from 172 billion transactions worth ₹246.82 lakh crore in 2024, reflecting rapid growth in digital financial adoption.

RBI Conducts Inaugural Payments Regulatory Board Meeting in Mumbai

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) held the first meeting of the Payments Regulatory Board (PRB) in Mumbai, chaired by Governor Sanjay Malhotra.
- ★ The Payments Regulatory Board (PRB) was constituted following an amendment to the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, which came into force on 9 May 2025.
- ★ The PRB reviewed the functions of the Department of Payment and Settlement Systems (DPSS) and examined key focus areas of domestic and global payment systems.
- ★ The Draft Payments Vision 2028 was presented before the Board, and strategic guidance was provided to strengthen and advance India's payment ecosystem.
- ★ The RBI shared findings from its Survey on Digital Payments, highlighting emerging trends and developments in digital transactions.
- ★ Members who attended the meeting included Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Nagaraju Maddirala, Secretary, Department of Financial Services, Aruna Sundararajan (IAS Retd.), T. Rabi Sankar, Deputy Governor, RBI, and Vivek Deep, Executive Director, RBI.

RBI Signs Agreement with Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi

- ★ Reserve Bank of India (RBI) signed an agreement with the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) under Section 21A(1) of the RBI Act, 1934.
- ★ From 9 January 2026, RBI will manage the banking operations and rupee public debt of GNCTD, marking a major financial reform for Delhi.
- ★ The agreement was formalised through an MoU at the Delhi Secretariat, chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, who also holds the Finance portfolio.
- ★ Under the new arrangement, Delhi will raise funds through State Development Loans (SDLs) at lower interest rates of around 7%, replacing earlier high borrowing costs of 12–13%, thereby improving fiscal efficiency.
- ★ RBI oversight will strengthen cash management, enabling automatic investment of surplus funds, and providing access to Ways and Means Advances (WMA) and Special Drawing Facilities (SDF) for temporary cash requirements.
- ★ A Central Government notification dated 2 January has formally separated Delhi's public accounts from the Government of India, granting Delhi an independent banking and borrowing structure for the first time, with support from the Union Government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Ties Up with TechFini to Strengthen UPI Infrastructure

- ★ Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (TMB) entered into a strategic partnership with TechFini, a Unified Payments Interface (UPI) infrastructure and fintech solutions provider, to strengthen its UPI acquiring and issuing capabilities.
- ★ Under the collaboration, TechFini (provided by Fin Meadows Technologies) will act as a Technology Service Provider (TSP) for TMB, managing UPI switching operations through the TechFini UPI Switch.
- ★ The partnership aims to create a faster, secure, and scalable UPI infrastructure to support Payment Aggregators (PAs), Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), merchants, and fintech partners across India.
- ★ A key focus of the collaboration is lending automation, expanding UPI-based use cases in loan disbursements, collections, and repayments.
- ★ Through UPI Autopay, the partnership will enable automated Equated Monthly Instalment (EMI) payments and loan repayments directly from customers' UPI handles.
- ★ The TechFini UPI Platform is a cloud-native solution offering Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP) services, UPI Plugin Software Development Kit (SDK), and end-to-end acquiring and issuing infrastructure.
- ★ The platform is designed to handle up to 10,000 transactions per second (TPS), ensuring high scalability and future-readiness for upcoming UPI innovations.

IBBI Introduces Revised Electronic Forms for Liquidation Process

- ★ The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has introduced revised electronic forms for the liquidation process, effective January 2026, to simplify compliance and improve the quality of regulatory filings.
- ★ The revision follows amendments to the IBBI (Liquidation Process) Regulations, 2016, notified on January 2, 2026, requiring insolvency professionals to submit liquidation-related forms with supporting enclosures on IBBI's electronic platform within prescribed timelines.
- ★ The move aims to strengthen transparency and reduce procedural complexity in the liquidation process.
- ★ The existing liquidation forms have been comprehensively revised to remove duplication and rationalise data requirements, leveraging technology to auto-populate information already available on the portal.
- ★ The new system is expected to reduce time and effort for regulatory compliance while maintaining availability of critical information.
- ★ Under the revised framework, four forms (LIQ-1 to LIQ-4) will now cover the entire lifecycle of liquidation, including commencement and public announcement, periodic progress reporting, asset realisation and distribution, unclaimed proceeds, stakeholders' consultation meetings, and receipts and payments up to dissolution or closure.
- ★ All revised forms, except LIQ-2, will be available from January 1, 2026, while LIQ-2 will be enabled from February 1, 2026; existing forms will be discontinued from these dates.
- ★ To ensure a smooth transition, IBBI has granted penalty relief for delayed filings during January–March 2026.

- ★ A form-modification utility with OTP-based authentication has been introduced to correct errors, while non-filing or submission of inaccurate information may attract regulatory action.

IDFC FIRST Bank Introduces Zero-Forex Diamond Reserve Credit Card

- ★ IDFC FIRST Bank launched the 'Zero-Forex Diamond Reserve Credit Card', a premium credit card designed for frequent international travellers, offering zero foreign exchange (Forex) markup along with travel and lifestyle benefits.
- ★ The card can be applied online via the bank's website or mobile app, with a ₹500 gift voucher on spending ₹5,000 within 30 days of card activation.
- ★ It provides domestic and international airport lounge access on a minimum monthly spend of ₹20,000, and airport meet-and-greet services on USD 1,000 annual spend.
- ★ It includes trip cancellation cover of ₹25,000, coverage for lost baggage and flight delays, ₹1 crore air accident insurance, and ₹10 lakh personal accident cover.
- ★ It carries a ₹3,000 GST joining and annual fee, waived on ₹6 lakh annual spend, with dynamic interest rates starting from 8.5% per annum, and 0% interest on global ATM withdrawals till due date (₹199 withdrawal fee applicable).
- ★ It also offers fuel surcharge waiver at select outlets and supports international ATM withdrawals with minimal charges.
- ★ Cardholders earn up to 60 reward points per ₹150 spent on hotels, 40 points on flights, and 10 points on other spends, with each reward point valued at ₹0.25.
- ★ Reward points come with lifetime validity, no earning cap, and can be redeemed online, enhancing long-term value for users.

RBI Proposes Banks to Cap Dividend Payouts at 75% of Net Profit

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed to raise the dividend payout cap for banks to 75% of net profit, up from the earlier 40%, subject to conditions.
- ★ Bank boards are required to review asset quality, provisioning gaps, capital projections, and long-term growth plans before declaring dividends.
- ★ The RBI has introduced a graded structure for dividend payment based on banks' Common Equity Tier 1 (CET1) capital levels.
- ★ Stronger banks with CET1 above 20% can pay 100% of adjusted net profit, which is calculated as net profit minus net non-performing assets for the dividend payment year, while adhering to the 75% payout limit.
- ★ Systemically important banks such as State Bank of India (SBI), HDFC Bank, and ICICI Bank require CET1 ratios of 20.8%, 20.4%, and 20.2% respectively to pay 100% of adjusted profits.
- ★ Banks with CET1 below 8% will not be permitted to declare dividends.
- ★ These RBI directions will come into effect from the financial year 2026-27.
- ★ The term dividend refers to the amount paid on equity shares, including interim dividend, but excludes dividends on Perpetual Non-Cumulative Preference Shares (PNCPS).

- ★ Banks can declare dividends only if they have a positive adjusted profit after tax (PAT) in the year for which the dividend is proposed.
- ★ For Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and Local Area Banks, the RBI has proposed a higher dividend cap of up to 80% of PAT.

Federal Bank Launches New Brand Identity 'The Fortuna Wave'

- ★ Federal Bank Limited, an Indian private sector bank, launched a refreshed brand identity named 'The Fortuna Wave' as part of a strategic brand refresh to signal modernization and future-readiness.
- ★ The launch of 'The Fortuna Wave' took place in Mumbai, Maharashtra, in the presence of Vidya Balan, the brand ambassador of Federal Bank.
- ★ The core element of the brand refresh is a new visual insignia called the 'Fortuna Wave'.
- ★ The Fortuna Wave insignia is built around three wave elements representing authenticity, togetherness, and prosperity.
- ★ The new design is more fluid and adaptable than the earlier boxed logo structure, enhancing visibility across both digital and physical platforms.
- ★ Key visual features of the refreshed identity include a dynamic wave motif, a fluid and rounded typeface for the 'FEDERAL BANK' wordmark, the retention of the signature yellow underline, and a vibrant, digital-friendly colour palette.

Axis Bank Introduces 'Safety Centre' on Mobile App

- ★ Axis Bank has launched a new 'Safety Centre' on its mobile banking app, open, to help customers protect their accounts from unauthorised or suspicious activities.
- ★ The Safety Centre empowers customers to control and customise security settings independently, without the need to visit a branch or contact customer care.
- ★ Customers can tailor security settings based on their usage patterns and comfort levels, enhancing digital banking safety.
- ★ The Safety Centre includes an SMS Shield, which verifies the authenticity of SMS messages by checking the Sender ID against Axis Bank's official IDs.
- ★ Customers can disable Internet Banking access completely if not required, and instantly restrict all fund transfer capabilities across Mobile Banking and Internet Banking with a single toggle.
- ★ The platform also allows blocking of transactions initiated through third-party apps (e.g., e-commerce platforms) that use Net Banking as a payment mode.
- ★ Users can restrict UPI transactions via the bank's mobile app, prevent the addition of new payees, and set limits for fund transfers and UPI transactions.
- ★ Overall, the Safety Centre strengthens account security, gives customers control over key digital banking functions, and reduces the risk of unauthorised access or fraud.

HDFC Bank Enables Digital Rupee (CBDC) Payments on SmartGateway

- ★ HDFC Bank integrated the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), known as the Digital Rupee (₹), into its online merchant payment platform, SmartGateway.

- ★ The integration allows SmartGateway to support Digital Rupee (CBDC) payments alongside existing options such as Unified Payments Interface (UPI), cards, and net banking.
- ★ Under the new system, merchants can accept Digital Rupee payments at zero transaction cost, enabling an intermediary-free and efficient settlement process.
- ★ The integration provides customers with a seamless, instant, and secure digital payment experience, combining UPI-like convenience with a sovereign-backed digital currency.
- ★ The initiative strengthens HDFC Bank's digital-first strategy and supports India's transition towards a cash-light and inclusive digital economy.

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- ★ Customers can tailor security settings based on their usage patterns and comfort levels, enhancing digital banking safety.
- ★ The Safety Centre includes an SMS Shield, which verifies the authenticity of SMS messages by checking the Sender ID against Axis Bank's official IDs.
- ★ Customers can disable Internet Banking access completely if not required, and instantly restrict all fund transfer capabilities across Mobile Banking and Internet Banking with a single toggle.
- ★ The platform also allows blocking of transactions initiated through third-party apps (e.g., e-commerce platforms) that use Net Banking as a payment mode.
- ★ Users can restrict UPI transactions via the bank's mobile app, prevent the addition of new payees, and set limits for fund transfers and UPI transactions.
- ★ Overall, the Safety Centre strengthens account security, gives customers control over key digital banking functions, and reduces the risk of unauthorised access or fraud.

HDFC Bank Enables Digital Rupee (CBDC) Payments on SmartGateway

- ★ HDFC Bank integrated the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), known as the Digital Rupee (₹), into its online merchant payment platform, SmartGateway.
- ★ The integration allows SmartGateway to support Digital Rupee (CBDC) payments alongside existing options such as Unified Payments Interface (UPI), cards, and net banking.
- ★ Under the new system, merchants can accept Digital Rupee payments at zero transaction cost, enabling an intermediary-free and efficient settlement process.
- ★ The integration provides customers with a seamless, instant, and secure digital payment experience, combining UPI-like convenience with a sovereign-backed digital currency.
- ★ The initiative strengthens HDFC Bank's digital-first strategy and supports India's transition towards a cash-light and inclusive digital economy.

RBI Proposes Mandatory 3-Year Cooling-Off Period for Co-operative Bank Directors After 10 Years

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed amendments to the Governance Directions, 2025 for Urban Co-operative Banks (UCBs) and State/Central Co-operative Banks, introducing a mandatory cooling-off period for directors.

- ★ The proposal aims to prevent circumvention of tenure limits, as RBI observed instances where directors resigned briefly and re-entered boards through re-election or co-option, defeating the intent of the Banking Regulation Act.
- ★ The existing framework prescribes a maximum continuous tenure of 10 years for directors, effective from June 2020 for UCBs and April 2021 for State and Central Co-operative Banks, which was enhanced from 8 years to 10 years in August 2025.
- ★ As per the proposed amendment, a director completing 10 years on a bank's board can be reappointed only after a cooling-off period of three years, irrespective of the mode of appointment.
- ★ During the three-year cooling-off period, the individual cannot be associated with the same bank in any capacity, except as a member or customer, though they may serve on the board of another bank.
- ★ For the purpose of calculating "continuous tenure", any interruption of less than three years will still be counted as continuous service, preventing artificial breaks to reset tenure limits.

Axis Finance Launches Collateral-Free Vyapar Business Loan for MSMEs

- ★ Axis Finance Limited, a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC), has launched Axis Finance Vyapar Business Loan, a collateral-free credit product aimed at supporting Micro and Small Businesses (MSMEs).
- ★ The Vyapar Business Loan specifically targets semi-urban and rural markets, enhancing access to formal credit for small entrepreneurs traditionally underserved by banks.
- ★ Under this scheme, loans up to ₹10 lakh are offered with flexible repayment tenures and zero collateral requirement, reducing financial entry barriers for MSMEs.
- ★ The loan is designed to empower businesses operating in the retail, service, and trading segments, helping them meet working capital and growth needs.

India's First Regional Rural Bank to Launch Fully Solar-Powered Mobile ATM Van 'TGB on Wheels'

- ★ Tripura Gramin Bank (TGB) created a national milestone by becoming the 1st Regional Rural Bank (RRB) in India to introduce India's first fully solar-powered mobile Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) van, named 'TGB on Wheels'.
- ★ The initiative represents a significant step towards sustainable, eco-friendly, and inclusive banking services, particularly benefiting rural and remote areas of the country.
- ★ The pioneering ATM Van initiative of TGB was formally inaugurated in July 2023 by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) during her visit to Tripura.
- ★ TGB on Wheels provides uninterrupted mobile ATM and banking services, ensuring access even in regions with limited or unreliable electricity supply.
- ★ The project was launched with the support of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), highlighting institutional backing for rural financial inclusion.
- ★ At present, Tripura Gramin Bank operates 3 solar-powered ATM vans across Tripura, strengthening last-mile banking connectivity.

- ★ For this innovative and sustainable banking initiative, TGB was honoured with the prestigious SKOCH Silver Award, recognizing excellence in governance and innovation.

SBI to Facilitate India–Israel Bilateral Trade Settlements in INR

- ★ State Bank of India (SBI), the only Indian bank with a branch in Israel, plans to facilitate bilateral trade between India and Israel in Indian Rupees (INR).
- ★ Trade settlements will be done through the Special Rupee Vostro Account (SRVA) mechanism, as permitted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), allowing exporters and importers to settle trade in INR.
- ★ SBI's Tel Aviv branch, opened in 2007, has remained fully operational despite the pandemic and ongoing regional conflicts, demonstrating strong resilience.
- ★ The bank will assist Indian workers in Israel by enabling remittances to India through NRI accounts and fintech partnerships.
- ★ The initiative aligns with deepening economic ties, including progress towards an India–Israel Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the recently signed Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT).
- ★ SBI's plan supports rupee-denominated trade settlements, allowing Israeli exporters and importers to receive and make payments in INR through SRVA accounts linked to invoices.
- ★ The Tel Aviv branch has secured all necessary regulatory approvals and actively engages with stakeholders, including the Israel-India Chamber of Commerce, to promote awareness of INR trade settlements.
- ★ SBI is expanding services for the growing Indian workforce in Israel, particularly in construction and agriculture, facilitating NRI accounts and exploring partnerships with fintech firms and local banks.
- ★ The rupee trade initiative coincides with intensified diplomatic engagement between India and Israel, including high-level visits and discussions between Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu.
- ★ SBI's expanded role positions it as a key financial bridge, supporting the next phase of India–Israel economic co-operation and promoting closer financial integration.

RBI Grants Innoviti Approval to Operate as Online and Offline Payment Aggregator

- ★ Innoviti Technologies Private Limited, a payments-centric retail Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform, received a Certificate of Authorization from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as a Payment Aggregator (PA) under the Payments and Settlement Systems (PSS) Act, 2007 across India.
- ★ The RBI authorisation allows Innoviti to manage both online and offline (in-store) payment transactions, expanding its operational scope nationwide.
- ★ Innoviti was initially authorised in March 2024 as an online Payment Aggregator, and the new licence now covers physical retail payments as well.
- ★ The expanded PA licence enables seamless, secure and compliant payment processing for enterprises and Small & Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

- ★ Innoviti operates India's largest offline payments platform, branded Innoviti UniPay, serving leading enterprise clients across the country.

Amazon Pay Launches Fixed Deposit Services in Partnership with 7 Banks and NBFCs

- ★ Amazon Pay has launched fixed deposit (FD) services on its fintech app as part of its expansion into fixed-income assets.
- ★ The platform has partnered with two NBFCs – Shriram Finance and Bajaj Finance – and five banks, including Shivalik Small Finance Bank, Suryoday Small Finance Bank, South Indian Bank, Slice, and Utkarsh Small Finance Bank.
- ★ Users can start investing in FDs with a minimum amount of ₹1,000 and access multiple institutions without opening separate bank accounts.
- ★ Deposits made through the app are insured up to ₹5 lakh per depositor per bank under DICGC (Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation) rules.
- ★ The move reflects a trend where fintech platforms act as distribution partners for banks and NBFCs, enabling deposit mobilisation and earning commission-based income.
- ★ Amazon Pay's FD initiative allows users to invest in fixed income assets through partner banks and NBFCs, offering a convenient and insured investment option.
- ★ Fintechs like Stable Money, money, MobiKwik, and others have similarly partnered with regulated entities to extend FD offerings in India.
- ★ Take rates on fixed deposits for fintechs are modest and depend on deposit size and tenure as per arrangements with partner banks.
- ★ This initiative strengthens Amazon Pay's position in financial services beyond digital payments, supporting retail investment penetration in India.

Karnataka Bank Launches Net Banking Facility for Khajane-2 e-Receipts

- ★ Karnataka Bank Limited has enabled its net banking platform to support payment and receipt of electronic receipts (e-receipts) for Government of Karnataka transactions through the Khajane-2 system.
- ★ The initiative highlights the bank's commitment to providing easy, secure, and value-added digital banking services to meet evolving customer needs.
- ★ Regulatory approvals for the initiative have been obtained from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Department of Treasuries, Government of Karnataka.
- ★ The bank is authorised to collect State Government revenue receipts through the Khajane-2 Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS).
- ★ Following successful technical integration with RBI's e-Kuber system and the Khajane-2 platform, customers can make seamless tax and fee payments via net banking.
- ★ The facility enables payments to various State Government departments in a digital and paperless manner.
- ★ By minimising manual processes and streamlining receipt handling, the initiative enhances citizen convenience.

- ★ The move also strengthens Karnataka's digital payments infrastructure and promotes efficient government revenue collection.

Canara Bank Joins Hands with NBSL to Offer UPI Services through Canara ai1Pe App

- ★ Canara Bank has partnered with NPCI BHIM Services Limited (NBSL) to integrate bank plug-ins for providing UPI services on its Canara ai1Pe banking app.
- ★ Through this partnership, Canara Bank can host the latest UPI features and upgrades developed for the BHIM app directly within its own application.
- ★ Canara Bank is the first bank in India to adopt this NBSL plug-in-based UPI delivery model.
- ★ The system allows white-labelling of BHIM's technology stack, enabling banks to offer UPI services while focusing on core banking operations.
- ★ The model was demonstrated through BHIM Vishwas, a proof-of-concept launched in 2025.
- ★ NBSL is a wholly-owned subsidiary of NPCI, formed in June 2024, and manages BHIM, which was originally launched in 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- ★ The integration supports improved security, operational resilience, and scalability, while helping the bank reduce cost and resources for developing and maintaining an independent UPI interface.
- ★ The white-label approach allows banks to leverage the BHIM technology stack while continuing to focus on core banking features.
- ★ The initiative reflects the growing trend of plug-in based digital payments solutions in India's UPI ecosystem.

Piramal Finance Raises USD 350 Million in Multilateral Funding from IFC and ADB

- ★ Piramal Finance Limited (PFL) secured USD 350 million multilateral funding, marking its first borrowing from Development Finance Institutions (DFIs).
- ★ The funding includes USD 200 million from the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and USD 150 million from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) under the Sustainable Finance Framework (SFF).
- ★ The facilities have a five-year maturity, with funds to be drawn in tranches between January 2026 and March 2026.
- ★ PFL is in advanced discussions to raise an additional USD 150 million from DFIs, targeting USD 500 million total multilateral funding in FY26.
- ★ The multilateral funding reflects strong confidence in PFL's governance standards, risk management practices, and technology-led lending platform.
- ★ The funds will be deployed to expand affordable housing finance, scale MSME credit, and increase lending to women borrowers and women-led enterprises.
- ★ Lending focus areas include Tier-2, Tier-3, semi-urban, and rural markets, supporting inclusive growth.
- ★ The borrowing helps diversify PFL's funding sources and reduce dependence on domestic capital markets, strengthening its long-term funding profile.

World Bank Approves USD 286 Million for West Bengal

- ★ The World Bank (WB) approved USD 286 million financing for the West Bengal Health System Reform Program (WBHSRP) to improve quality of life and life expectancy for over 90 million people through equitable access to quality healthcare services.
- ★ The program aims to support personalized healthcare services across West Bengal for people over 30 years.
- ★ WBHSRP provides digital tracking of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension and diabetes.
- ★ The International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) approved a loan with a maturity of 16.5 years, including a grace period of 3 years.
- ★ **Health indicators in West Bengal:**
 - Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) declined from 32 deaths per 1000 births (2012–2018) to 19 deaths per 1000 births (2018–2020).
 - Total Fertility Rate (TFR) stood at 1.64 births per woman (2019), among the lowest in India.
 - Life expectancy in the state reached 72 years, above the national average.
- ★ **Challenges:** West Bengal has the second-highest rate of adolescent pregnancies in India (16%), contributing to a Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of 103 deaths per 1,00,000 live births (2018).
- ★ WBHSRP will support strengthening gender-based violence (GBV) services, including targeted interventions for boys, married adolescents, and healthcare providers.
- ★ The program will focus on five districts: Purulia, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Maldah, and Uttar Dinajpur, aiming to enhance access to quality healthcare and reduce inequities in maternal and adolescent health.

State Bank of India Signs Memorandum of Understanding with Tamil Nadu

- ★ The State Bank of India (SBI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Tamil Nadu (TN) to provide enhanced benefits under the Corporate Salary Package (CSP) for State Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)
- ★ The MoU was signed by R. Balaji, Additional Director and ex-officio Joint Secretary, Finance Department, TN, and Smitha S. Nair, Deputy General Manager, SBI.
- ★ The Corporate Salary Package (CSP) offers zero-balance salary accounts, concessional interest rates on home, car, and personal loans, and waiver of processing fees across select banking and loan services, ensuring cost savings for employees.
- ★ Employees under the CSP receive premium banking support, including dedicated relationship managers, wealth management solutions, and secure, customized digital banking platforms for seamless transactions.

SBI Life Introduces 'Smart Platina Advantage' Life Insurance Savings Plan

- ★ SBI Life Insurance launched 'SBI Life – Smart Platina Advantage', an individual, non-linked, non-participating life insurance savings plan offering long-term guaranteed benefits and life insurance protection to support financial goals across life stages, such as children's education, retirement, and wealth creation.

- ★ The plan is savings-oriented, providing guaranteed benefits and financial protection throughout the policy term.
- ★ Life cover is provided to ensure family security in case of the life assured's death.
- ★ The plan features limited premium payment terms, assured guaranteed additions every policy year, and flexible maturity payout options (lump sum or installments) for post-maturity liquidity.
- ★ Minimum annual premium starts from ₹50,000, with tax benefits under Income Tax Act provisions (typically Section 80C and 10(10D)).
- ★ Policy term options include limited premium payment of 7 or 10 years with coverage for 15, 20, or 30 years.
- ★ Guaranteed additions accrue annually to boost maturity value, with higher additions for larger premiums and longer terms.
- ★ Maturity proceeds can be received in installments up to 7 years for post-maturity liquidity.
- ★ The plan ensures predictable outcomes with guaranteed additions and protection irrespective of market fluctuations.

Indian fintech firm ZET Secures National Payments Corporation of India Nod to Enable UPI Payments through RuPay Credit Cards

- ★ Credit-focused Indian fintech firm ZET has received approval from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to operate as a Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP).
- ★ With this approval, ZET becomes eligible to offer UPI services, marking a major step in integrating credit card functionality with the UPI ecosystem.
- ★ After receiving NPCI approval, the company launched ZET UPI, enabling users to make UPI transactions using RuPay credit cards issued via the ZET platform.
- ★ ZET UPI service is supported through a banking partnership with RBL Bank (earlier known as Ratnakar Bank Limited).
- ★ The transaction processing infrastructure is powered by Juspay, a payments technology platform.
- ★ ZET credit card users with an active subscription plan will be eligible for cashback benefits on UPI transactions, in addition to existing credit card-linked rewards.
- ★ The move strengthens credit-based digital payments and expands RuPay credit card usage on UPI, aligning with India's push for fintech-led financial inclusion.

Razorpay POS Obtains Reserve Bank of India Approval to Operate as Offline Payment Aggregator

- ★ Fintech major Razorpay's offline payments arm, Razorpay POS, has received authorisation from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to operate as an offline payment aggregator (PA-P).
- ★ With this approval, Razorpay now holds all three key RBI licences: online payment aggregator, cross-border payment aggregator (granted in December 2025), and offline payment aggregator.
- ★ The PA-P (Offline) licence will enable Razorpay POS to expand in-store payment infrastructure and handle high-volume transactions across sectors such as large retail chains and SMEs.

- ★ Currently, Razorpay POS offers a hardware suite including Android Smart POS, mPOS (magnetic stripe POS), and Soundbox devices, supporting secure and compliant in-store payments.

Reserve Bank of India Gives In-Principle Nod to Payoneer India to Operate as Cross-Border Payment Aggregator

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) granted in-principle approval to Payoneer India Private Limited to operate as a Payment Aggregator – Cross Border (PA-CB).
- ★ Payoneer India Private Limited is a subsidiary of USA-based Payoneer Global, strengthening its presence in India's cross-border payments ecosystem.
- ★ The PA-CB approval allows Payoneer to facilitate end-to-end inward and outward cross-border payment transactions for Indian importers and exporters.
- ★ Under this approval, Indian exporters can receive overseas payments, while importers can make international payments through the Payoneer platform.
- ★ The key objective of RBI's approval is to support Indian businesses, especially Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and startups, in accessing global markets and scaling international trade operations.
- ★ As per RBI's PA-CB guidelines, non-bank entities must obtain RBI authorisation to operate as cross-border payment aggregators.
- ★ Net worth requirement for PA-CB entities: ₹15 crore initially, increasing to ₹25 crore by the end of the third year.
- ★ The per-transaction limit under PA-CB norms is capped at ₹25 lakh.
- ★ PA-CB entities must maintain separate accounts for import and export transactions, with no netting of balances

Bank of Baroda Enters Memorandum of Understanding with IIFCL

- ★ Bank of Baroda signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL) to facilitate joint lending and loan syndication for a wide range of infrastructure projects.
- ★ Under the agreement, IIFCL and Bank of Baroda will collaborate to jointly finance diverse infrastructure projects across both established and emerging sectors, leveraging their respective strengths and expertise.
- ★ IIFCL is a wholly-owned Government of India company, established in 2006 to provide long-term financial assistance to viable infrastructure projects.

Suryoday Small Finance Bank Collaborates with HyperVerge

- ★ Suryoday Small Finance Bank partnered with HyperVerge to deploy an AI-powered Video KYC (VKYC) solution for digital customer onboarding.
- ★ The VKYC solution will help the bank strengthen regulatory compliance, improve operational efficiency, and enhance digital onboarding.
- ★ The system ensures high-level data security, with customer personal data stored securely, accessible only by Suryoday Small Finance Bank.

- ★ The VKYC solution enables the bank to scale onboarding volumes without adding operational overhead, while maintaining a high-quality customer experience.
- ★ Each agent can complete nearly twice the number of agent-approved verification calls per day compared to previous workflows, improving conversions and productivity.
- ★ HyperVerge collaborated closely with the bank to deliver a solution that onboards customers faster, improves success rates, and ensures regulatory adherence.
- ★ The data privacy controls are strict, ensuring personal data security and reinforcing the bank's regulatory commitments.

Receivables Exchange of India Limited Becomes First TReDS Platform in India to Return Capital to Shareholders

- ★ Receivables Exchange of India Limited (RXIL), a Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) platform, has declared and paid an interim dividend of 21.6% on the face value of its shares.
- ★ RXIL has become the first TReDS platform in India to return capital to stakeholders, marking a historic milestone in the Indian TReDS ecosystem.
- ★ RXIL received Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approval in December 2016 and carried out its first TReDS transaction on 9 January 2017.
- ★ RXIL is a joint venture of Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE), with partner banks State Bank of India (SBI), ICICI Bank, and Yes Bank.
- ★ RXIL operates as a digital platform for trade receivables financing, supporting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- ★ RXIL is the only TReDS platform in India that permits State Government participation, with Goa and Tamil Nadu (TN) Governments actively involved.

Buyforex Gets In-Principle Payment Service Provider Nod at GIFT IFSC

- ★ EbixCash World Money, a flagship subsidiary of Eraaya Lifespaces Limited, announced that its wholly owned entity Buyforex received in-principle approval for Payment Service Provider (PSP)
- ★ The approval was granted by the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA), enabling the company to operate as a regulated PSP from GIFT IFSC (Gujarat International Finance Tec-City).
- ★ Buyforex has become the first Authorised Dealer Category-II (AD-II) group entity to receive this specific authorization at the international financial hub.
- ★ Under this in-principle approval, Buyforex is authorized to undertake four key payment services: Account issuance, E-money issuance, Merchant acquisition, and Cross-border fund transfers.
- ★ The milestone significantly strengthens the EbixCash Group's regulated payments footprint and supports India's goal to position GIFT IFSC as a global hub for cross-border payments and financial services.
- ★ The authorization allows the group to deliver secure, compliant, and globally scalable payment solutions to international merchants, financial institutions, and enterprises while leveraging the IFSCA's globally aligned regulatory framework.

- ★ Eraaya Lifespaces Limited (formerly Justride Enterprises) completed its acquisition of Ebix Inc. and its global subsidiaries in August 2024, which included the EbixCash brand.

RBI Issues 2026 Amendment Directions on CRR and SLR for Commercial Banks

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued amendment directions for Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) and Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) applicable to commercial banks, updating the 2025 directions.
- ★ The amendments came into immediate effect and are based on recent changes in banking laws and regulations made in 2025.
- ★ RBI added a reference to “other development financial institutions” in the CRR–SLR rules, as defined under the RBI Act, 1934.
- ★ Reporting formats have been updated to clearly include institutions like National Housing Bank (NHB), SIDBI, and NaBFID, replacing older references such as IDBI.
- ★ The amendments are procedural and clarificatory only and do not change the existing CRR or SLR rates for banks.

World Bank Approves ₹5,700 Crore for Haryana’s Jal Sanrakshit Project

- ★ The World Bank has approved ₹5,700 crore in technical and financial assistance for Haryana under the Jal Sanrakshit Haryana Project, aiming to make the state self-reliant in the water sector.
- ★ The funds will be disbursed in phases from 2026 to 2032 for canal restoration, micro-irrigation, groundwater recharge, and sustainable agriculture.
- ★ Out of 1,570 major canals, 892 canals have been restored over the past 20 years, and 678 canals are planned for restoration in the next five years.
- ★ Restoration of major canals includes 115 canals with World Bank assistance (₹2,325 crore), 284 canals through the state budget (₹2,230 crore), and 279 canals via NABARD (₹2,880 crore).
- ★ Out of 15,562 minor canals under the Micro Irrigation & Command Area Development Authority (MICADA), 4,487 minor canals have been restored, and 1,961 minor canals are planned for restoration.
- ★ Restoration of minor canals includes 400 canals with World Bank support (₹450 crore), 1,500 canals via state budget (₹1,250 crore), and 61 canals through NABARD (₹402 crore).
- ★ With World Bank support of ₹900 crore, micro-irrigation systems will be implemented over approximately 70,000 acres of agricultural land.
- ★ The Agriculture Department will develop tube-well-based drainage and surface drainage systems to address waterlogging over 2,00,000 acres.
- ★ Sustainable agriculture will be promoted through crop diversification, direct seeding of rice (DSR), and other water-conservation measures, supported by ₹886 crore from the World Bank.
- ★ About 80 water bodies will be constructed in southern Haryana to strengthen groundwater recharge.
- ★ Treated water from four major sewage treatment plants (STPs) in Jind, Kaithal, and Gurugram will be reused to irrigate 28,000 acres, supported by ₹600 crore from the World Bank.

- ★ On completion, Haryana's entire canal network will be fully lined and function efficiently for the next 25 years, eliminating the need for frequent canal restoration.
- ★ The project will expand irrigation facilities to 2 lakh additional acres and help farmers overcome waterlogging
- ★ Since irrigation currently consumes mostly freshwater, this project will save water for drinking purposes.
- ★ Farmers are encouraged to adopt micro-irrigation systems in paddy cultivation to achieve higher yields and address problems caused by open-field water usage.

RBI Flags PSL Compliance Gaps at HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) flagged deficiencies in Priority Sector Lending (PSL) compliance at HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank during its annual supervisory review, mainly due to misclassification of agricultural loans.
- ★ RBI directed ICICI Bank to make a one-time additional provision of ₹1,283 crore and HDFC Bank to provide ₹500 crore as a regulatory corrective measure, despite no immediate asset quality stress.
- ★ The regulator found parts of the agriculture loan portfolios exceeded the prescribed "scale of finance" limits, indicating loans used for non-farm purposes were still classified as agricultural PSL.
- ★ The RBI annual supervisory review assesses compliance with regulatory norms, including priority sector targets and reporting accuracy.
- ★ Under current rules, banks must lend 40% of adjusted net bank credit to priority sectors, with 18% of this target earmarked for agriculture.
- ★ Shortfalls in PSL targets lead to penalties or corrective actions, with penalties credited to the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF).

RBI and European Securities and Markets Authority Sign Memorandum of Understanding

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on January 27, 2026, for co-operation and information exchange related to Central Counterparties (CCPs) regulated by RBI.
- ★ This MoU replaces the earlier agreement signed on 28 February 2017, which had lapsed, updating the framework for supervisory co-operation between the two authorities.
- ★ The agreement enables RBI and ESMA to co-operate on oversight of CCPs in accordance with their respective legal and regulatory frameworks, resolving a long-standing impasse.
- ★ The MoU establishes a framework for ESMA to rely on RBI's regulatory and supervisory activities for Indian clearing houses (like CCIL), while safeguarding EU financial stability.
- ★ The agreement strengthens India-EU financial market linkages and reinforces global coordination in the regulation of critical financial market infrastructures.
- ★ The MoU was signed by Vivek Deep, Executive Director of RBI, and Verena Ross, Chair of ESMA.

- ★ The agreement demonstrates the importance of cross-border co-operation to facilitate international clearing activities, potentially reducing capital charges for European banks operating in India.

Bharti AXA Life Launches “Swabhimaan Retirement” Deferred Annuity Plan

- ★ Bharti AXA Life Insurance has launched a non-linked, non-participating individual deferred annuity plan named “Swabhimaan Retirement” to help customers lock in current annuity rates and secure guaranteed lifelong income.
- ★ The plan offers lifetime annuity payouts on a monthly, quarterly, half-yearly, or annual basis, with a joint-life option to ensure continued income for the surviving spouse.
- ★ The plan provides Premium Payment Term (PPT) options of 2, 3, and 5 years, with deferment periods of up to 7 years under select annuity options.
- ★ The plan allows partial withdrawal of surrender value after completion of premium payments, subject to policy terms and conditions.
- ★ The plan includes an Atmanirbhar option, allowing customers to withdraw funds in case of emergency.
- ★ Bharti AXA Life Insurance is a prominent Indian private life insurer, established in 2006, functioning as a joint venture between Bharti Enterprises (74% stake) and France-based AXA Group (26% stake).
- ★ The plan enables customers to plan early, lock in annuity rates at current levels, and ensure guaranteed income security for life for the policyholder or spouse.

SMFG India Credit Partners with Google Pay

- ★ SMFG India Credit (SMICC) has partnered with Google Pay to offer collateral-free personal loans to users across India.
- ★ Eligible Google Pay users can now apply for personal loans directly within the app, enabling quick and seamless digital loan disbursement (often within minutes).
- ★ The collaboration aims to expand access to formal credit, especially for underserved and emerging customer segments, supporting the vision of a digitally inclusive economy.
- ★ The digital lending process is designed to be fast, safe, and flexible, catering to India’s increasingly digital-savvy population.
- ★ The initiative promotes financial inclusion by providing formal credit facilities to individuals who may have previously lacked access to traditional banking.
- ★ The partnership strengthens SMICC’s position in the digital ecosystem, leveraging innovative technology to increase social impact.
- ★ Google Pay is a mobile payment service developed by Google that supports in-app, online, and in-person contactless transactions on mobile devices.

RBI Proposes Changes to Banks’ FX Exposure Framework and Capital Requirements for FX Risk

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has proposed changes to the framework for calculating banks’ net foreign exchange (FX) exposure and the capital requirements for FX risk.

- ★ The objective of the proposals is to align India's FX risk norms with global standards (Basel Committee) and ensure uniform implementation across all regulated entities.
- ★ Under the proposed framework, banks must maintain a minimum capital charge of 9% on their net open foreign exchange positions.
- ★ The revised rules mandate that FX risk capital be maintained at the close of each business day, thereby strengthening daily risk management.
- ★ The RBI has invited public feedback on the proposals, which are proposed to come into effect from 1 April 2027.

RBI May Postpone Mandatory Climate Risk Reporting for Banks

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has put on hold plans to require domestic banks to disclose and manage climate-related risks.
- ★ Globally, understanding climate-related risks and green investments is key to transitioning to a low-carbon economy, with countries like the United Kingdom (UK) and Japan making disclosures mandatory for financial institutions.
- ★ RBI's proposed climate disclosure norms, under discussion with banks since 2022, would have required regular disclosure of climate-related risks in loan portfolios, along with mitigation strategies and targets.
- ★ Draft rules published in 2022 proposed voluntary implementation starting FY2027 (April 1, 2027).
- ★ RBI decided to delay final guidelines, citing that climate disclosure is not a priority and that implementation could be costly and onerous for corporates lacking mandatory climate reporting.
- ★ Separately, RBI has proposed guidelines for banks and regulated entities to implement resolution plans during natural calamities.
- ★ The draft norms would have required banks to calculate gross emissions of borrowers, disclose by asset classes and industries, and analyse the impact of adverse climate events on borrowers' repayment ability.
- ★ Implementation could have led to higher loan pricing for emission-heavy sectors and borrowers in climate-sensitive zones.
- ★ India ranks ninth globally in climate vulnerability according to the Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index 2026, which tracked 1995–2024 extreme weather events.
- ★ During this period, India experienced 430 extreme weather events, resulting in over 80,000 deaths and economic losses of around \$170 billion, exposing lenders to credit risks.

ECONOMY

India Overtakes Japan to Emerge as the World's Fourth-Largest Economy

- ★ India has surpassed Japan to become the world's 4th largest economy, with a GDP of USD 4.18 trillion, and is expected to overtake Germany by 2030 to rank 3rd globally.

- ★ India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, with real GDP growth rising to 8.2% in Q2 FY26, compared to 7.8% in Q1 FY26 and 7.4% in Q4 FY25, showing strong growth momentum.
- ★ The Government of India projects that the economy will expand to USD 7.3 trillion by 2030, reinforcing India's path to becoming the third-largest economy in the world.
- ★ The United States remains the largest global economy, followed by China in the second position, while India ranks fourth at present.
- ★ Major global institutions have expressed confidence in India's growth outlook, with projections from the World Bank (6.5% in 2026), IMF (6.6% in 2025; 6.2% in 2026) and OECD (6.7% in 2025; 6.2% in 2026).
- ★ Additional growth forecasts underline optimism, including Moody's (6.4% in 2026), S&P Global (6.5% in FY26), Asian Development Bank (7.2% in 2025) and Fitch Ratings (7.4% in FY26), supporting India's strong medium-term economic outlook.

Credit Guarantee Scheme for Exporters Operational on Jan Samarth Portal from December 1, 2025

- ★ Exports are a critical pillar of India's economy, contributing nearly 21% of GDP, generating robust foreign exchange inflows, supporting the current account balance, and ensuring macroeconomic stability.
- ★ Export-oriented industries employ over 45 million people, both directly and indirectly, while MSMEs contribute about 45% of India's total exports, underlining their importance in sustained export growth.
- ★ To support exporters amid global uncertainties and external headwinds, the Department of Financial Services (DFS) operationalised the Credit Guarantee Scheme for Exporters (CGSE) from December 1, 2025, with the Government providing a 100% guarantee for additional loan facilities under the scheme.
- ★ The CGSE provides a credit guarantee to exporters and MSMEs, enabling banks and financial institutions (Member Lending Institutions – MLIs) to extend additional collateral-free credit, thereby improving liquidity and ensuring business continuity.
- ★ The scheme envisages collateral-free credit support of up to ₹20,000 crore to direct and indirect exporter MSMEs through eligible MLIs.
- ★ As of December 31, 2025, 1,788 applications amounting to ₹8,599 crore were received, of which 716 applications worth ₹3,141 crore were sanctioned, reflecting strong confidence among exporters and MSMEs.
- ★ Eligible exporters can avail working capital loans up to 20% of their existing export credit or working capital limits, helping them upgrade capabilities, enhance global competitiveness, and diversify into new and emerging markets.
- ★ By improving liquidity access, the scheme aims to ensure continuity of operations, sustain employment, and strengthen India's export ecosystem.
- ★ The CGSE is open until March 31, 2026, or until guarantees worth ₹20,000 crore are issued, and is implemented by DFS through the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC).

India Ratings Forecasts 6.9% GDP Growth for India in FY27

- ★ India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Fitch Group, projected India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at 6.9% in FY27, lower than the estimated 7.4% growth in FY26.
- ★ The FY27 growth outlook faces several risk factors, including a possible El Niño pattern from mid-2026, weak investment momentum, sluggish global trade growth, and soft current demand conditions.
- ★ Base effect risks arise due to the proposed change in base year for GDP to 2022-23 and Consumer Price Index (CPI) to 2024, replacing earlier base years 2011-12 and 2012, respectively.
- ★ Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE), a key indicator of household demand, stood at 5.6% in FY24, increased to 7.2% in FY25, and further improved to 7.5% in H1 FY26 (April–September).
- ★ Ind-Ra projected PFCE growth at 7.6% year-on-year in FY27, highlighting its importance as PFCE accounts for nearly 55.9% of GDP (Q2 FY26) from the demand side.
- ★ The agency stated that India's inflation outlook for Q4 FY26 and FY27 remains benign, supporting macroeconomic stability.

World Bank Estimates India's Economic Growth at 7.2% for FY26

- ★ The World Bank Group (WBG) released its flagship report titled “Global Economic Prospects (GEP): January 2026”, which projected India's GDP growth at 7.2% in FY26, revised upward from the 3% forecast in June 2025.
- ★ India's FY26 growth is mainly driven by robust domestic demand, including strong private consumption, supported by tax reforms and rising rural household incomes.
- ★ The report projected that India's GDP growth will moderate to 6.5% in FY27, lower than the earlier estimate of 7.2%, assuming 50% import tariffs imposed by the USA remain throughout the forecast period.
- ★ India's GDP growth is expected to edge up to 6.6% in FY28, aided by robust services sector activity, recovery in exports, and a pickup in investment.
- ★ The impact of higher US tariffs on Indian exports is expected to be offset by stronger-than-expected domestic demand
- ★ India's inflation is projected to converge to RBI's target of 4%, assuming stable seasonal conditions that help contain food price inflation.
- ★ The global growth rate is projected to slow marginally by 10 basis points (bps) from 2.7% in CY25 to 2.6% in CY26.
- ★ The South Asia region's growth is projected to rise to 7.1% in CY25, supported by strong economic activity in India, which offsets rising trade tensions and policy uncertainty.
- ★ The South Asia growth rate is expected to ease to 6.2% in CY26 due to the impact of higher US tariffs on India's exports.
- ★ The World Bank excludes Pakistan and Afghanistan from the South Asia region, placing them under the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

International Monetary Fund Upgrades India's FY26 Growth Projection to 7.3%

- ★ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) released the World Economic Outlook (WEO) titled "Global Economy: Steady amid Divergent Forces", revising India's GDP growth for FY26 to 7.3%, up from 6% (October 2025 estimate).
- ★ The upward revision is driven by strong corporate earnings in Q3 and robust economic momentum in Q4, with the IMF's estimate only slightly below the Government of India's projection of 7.4%.
- ★ For the medium term, the IMF projects India's growth to moderate to 6.4% in FY27 and FY28, citing easing cyclical and temporary growth factors.
- ★ India's inflation is expected to move closer to the RBI's target band of 2%–6%, supported by a sharp decline in 2025, mainly due to easing food prices.
- ★ Among emerging and developing Asian economies, India remains the fastest-growing, contributing significantly to Asia's projected 5.0% growth in 2026.
- ★ The global economy is projected to grow by 3.3% in CY25, 3.2% in CY26, and 3.2% in CY27, supported by easing trade tensions, accommodative financial conditions, and technology-driven investments.
- ★ Global inflation is forecast to decline from 1% (CY25) to 3.8% (CY26) and further to 3.4% (CY27).
- ★ Global trade volume growth is projected to slow from 4.1% in CY25 to 2.6% in CY26, before rebounding to 3.1% in CY27, reflecting policy adjustments and front-loading effects.
- ★ The IMF highlighted that steady global growth is shaped by a balance between uncertain trade policies and gains from AI and technology investments, particularly in North America and Asia.

Moody's Forecasts India's GDP Growth at 7.3% in FY26

- ★ Global credit rating agency Moody's Ratings projected that India will record a GDP growth rate of 7.3% in FY26, higher than 6.5% in FY25.
- ★ The report highlighted that robust economic expansion is expected to support average household incomes and boost demand for insurance protection.
- ★ India's GDP per capita rose 8.2% Y-o-Y to reach USD 11,176 in FY25.
- ★ Moody's report highlighted that India's insurance sector is expected to benefit from sustained premium growth supported by economic expansion, digitisation, tax reforms, and planned reforms in state-owned insurers.
- ★ Total insurance premium revenue grew 17%, reaching ₹ 10.9 lakh crore during April–November 2025-26.
- ★ Health insurance premiums increased by 14%, while life insurance new business premiums surged 20%, compared to 7% growth in FY25, when total premiums were ₹ 11.9 lakh crore.
- ★ Government initiatives include minority stake sale in LIC, recapitalization of state-owned insurers, and increasing foreign investment limit from 74% to 100% in Indian insurance companies.
- ★ Objective of Reforms Enhance profitability, provide financial flexibility, and strengthen the insurance sector.

DEFENCE

Indian Naval Sailing Vessel Kaundinya Sets Sail on Maiden Overseas Voyage

- ★ Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) Kaundinya, an engine-less Indian Naval Sailing Vessel, embarked on its maiden overseas voyage from Porbandar, Gujarat, to Muscat, Oman on December 29, 2025.
- ★ The expedition seeks to retrace ancient maritime routes that historically linked India's western coast with Oman, thereby reviving India's maritime heritage and seafaring traditions.
- ★ The 65-foot-long INSV Kaundinya has been constructed entirely using traditional stitched-shipbuilding techniques, with materials and methods dating back several centuries, inspired by a 5th century ship painting in the Ajanta Caves.
- ★ The vessel represents a unique blend of history, indigenous craftsmanship, and naval expertise, featuring culturally significant motifs like the Gandabherunda (two-headed eagle) and a Harappan-style stone anchor.
- ★ The voyage will span approximately 1,400 kilometres across the sea and is expected to take around 15 days, steered by giant oars and square sails rather than a modern rudder.
- ★ A total of 18 sailors (comprising 4 officers and 14 naval sailors) are onboard the vessel for this historic expedition, skippered by Commander Vikas Sheoran.
- ★ The vessel was formally flagged off by Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, in the presence of the Ambassador of Oman to India, Issa Saleh Al Shibani, underscoring strong India-Oman cultural and maritime ties.

Indian Army Inaugurates 'Radio Sangam' Community Radio Station

- ★ The Indian Army (IA), in collaboration with the civil administration and local residents, launched "Radio Sangam", a Community Radio Station, at Keri village in Doongi block, Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), located near the Line of Control (LoC).
- ★ Radio Sangam is the first community radio station established along the LoC, aimed at enhancing communication and information outreach for border-area communities.
- ★ The radio station broadcasts on 88.8 Frequency Modulation (FM) from Keri Village, strengthening local-level connectivity and awareness.
- ★ Radio Sangam functions as a trusted source of verified information, promotes local culture, music, and entertainment, and helps build trust and co-operation among the Indian Army, civil administration, and villagers.
- ★ The station will air diverse programmes, including public awareness campaigns, agriculture and livelihood guidance, local news and updates, cultural shows, and interactive community programs, making it important for security, governance, and social development.

Indian Army Designates 2026 as the Year of Networking and Data Centricity

- ★ The Indian Army (IA), under the leadership of Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Upendra Dwivedi, declared 2026 as the 'Year of Networking & Data Centricity', aligning with the Indian Army's 2026 vision to build a future-ready and technology-driven force.

- ★ The initiative focuses on digital integration and enhanced connectivity to support real-time decision-making, faster response, and greater combat effectiveness across the force.
- ★ The core objective is to treat data as a critical operational asset, improving situational awareness, speed of command, and battlefield efficiency.
- ★ It forms part of the Indian Army's decade-long transformation, driven by military reforms, jointness among services, innovation, and self-reliance.
- ★ Under the networking component, seamless digital connectivity is being created among soldiers, command and control centres, sensors, weapon systems, intelligence units, and logistics networks.
- ★ The data-centric approach enables real-time collection, processing, and sharing of battlefield data, allowing simultaneous and precise coordinated actions across multiple platforms.
- ★ Indigenisation is a key pillar, with indigenous communication systems, battlefield management systems, and secure defence networks forming the technological backbone of the initiative.
- ★ The declaration builds upon the 2024–25 theme of the 'Year of Technology Absorption', by operationalising and fully integrating previously absorbed technologies into active military operations, making it highly relevant for defence and national security examinations.

Defence Research and Development Organisation Develops 'SWaDeS' Portable

- ★ The Defence Laboratory Jodhpur (DLJ), under the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), developed a portable water purification system named Sea Water Desalination System (SWaDeS) to provide safe drinking water to soldiers deployed in remote, coastal, and water-scarce regions.
- ★ SWaDeS is available in manual-operated and engine-driven variants, offering flexibility for deployment in diverse and challenging terrains.
- ★ The engine-operated variant can desalinate seawater with Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) up to ~35,000 mg/L to below 500 mg/L, sufficient to meet the needs of 20–25 soldiers.
- ★ The manual-operated unit is lightweight and portable, designed to support 10–12 personnel, especially in power-scarce and remote locations.
- ★ The engine-operated SWaDeS can be set up within 2–3 minutes, enabling rapid deployment during operations, while manual units are suited for long-range patrols.
- ★ Both variants have successfully passed Acceptance Test Procedures (ATPs), confirming their field reliability and operational readiness.
- ★ SWaDeS is suitable for naval operations, coastal installations, inland saline water bodies such as Pangong Tso, and long-range military patrols.
- ★ The system is equipped with a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) water purification module, ensuring safe drinking water even in contaminated and high-risk environments.

Indian Army Launches 'Bhairav' Modern Warfare Force with Large-Scale Drone Integration

- ★ Indian Army (IA) announced the creation of a modern warfare force named 'Bhairav', aimed at enhancing combat capabilities through large-scale drone integration and creation of a pool of over 1 lakh trained drone operatives.

- ★ Bhairav units are being trained to handle the complexities of modern warfare, with a strong focus on advanced drone-based operations.
- ★ The Bhairav battalions are fully trained in the use of drones for real-time targeting of enemy bases and formations during operations.
- ★ These battalions have been raised as a high-speed offensive force, capable of executing Special Forces-type tasking at multiple operational levels.
- ★ The primary aim of Bhairav battalions is to bridge the gap between Para Special Forces (SF) and regular Infantry units, enabling special operations from tactical to operational depth.
- ★ At present, the Indian Army has raised about 15 Bhairav battalions, which are deployed across various formations along both borders.
- ★ The IA plans to raise around 25 additional Bhairav battalions in the near future to further strengthen modern combat readiness.
- ★ The Bhairav battalions will make their first public appearance at the Indian Army Day Parade in Jaipur, Rajasthan on January 15, 2026.
- ★ As part of broader modern warfare restructuring, the Indian Army has also created 'Rudra Brigades', which are all-arms formations integrating infantry, mechanised units, tanks, artillery, Special Forces, and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UASs).

Indian Navy's First Training Squadron Undertakes Long-Range Training Deployment to Southeast Asia

- ★ The First Training Squadron (1TS) of the Indian Navy (IN) began its Long-Range Training Deployment (LRTD) to Southeast Asia as part of the 110th Integrated Officers' Training Course (IOTC), providing real operational sea experience to naval cadets.
- ★ Long-Range Training Deployment (LRTD) is a specialised naval training mission in which ships with cadets and trainees sail for extended durations across long distances, often entering foreign waters.
- ★ The deployment comprises vessels from the Indian Navy (IN) and Indian Coast Guard (ICG), including INS Tir, INS Shardul, INS Sujata, and ICGS Sarathi.
- ★ During the LRTD, trainees gain hands-on exposure in seamanship, navigation, and professional naval operations across diverse maritime environments.
- ★ The squadron is scheduled to undertake port calls in Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand, enabling training engagements and maritime interactions.
- ★ The deployment strengthens India's Act East Policy, reinforces ties with Southeast Asia, and supports the vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

Indian Navy Sets Up New Naval Detachment at Haldia, West Bengal

- ★ The Indian Navy (IN) has initiated a new naval base at Haldia, West Bengal (WB) to strengthen operational presence, maritime surveillance, and rapid response capabilities in the Bay of Bengal (BOB).
- ★ The Haldia detachment aims to enhance maritime security, coastal defence, rapid response, and protection of sea lanes amid rising extra-regional naval activity.

- ★ The base is located on the Hooghly River near the Haldi River, approximately 130 km from the Sandheads, leveraging the Haldia Dock Complex with a jetty, admin-logistics facilities, and accommodation for around 100 personnel.
- ★ The naval detachment will conduct coastal security, anti-piracy patrols, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and non-combatant evacuation operations (NEOs).
- ★ The facility will primarily support small, high-speed warships, including Fast Interceptor Crafts (FICs) and New Water Jet Fast Attack Crafts (NWJFACs), in line with Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)-approved procurement for coastal security enhancement.
- ★ India's existing naval commands include the Western Naval Command (WNC) in Mumbai, Maharashtra, the Eastern Naval Command (ENC) in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, and the Southern Naval Command (SNC) for training in Kochi, Kerala.

Trilateral Coast Guard Exercise 'DOSTI 17'

- ★ The 17th edition of the biennial trilateral Coast Guard exercise 'DOSTI 17' commenced in Male, Maldives, involving the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), Sri Lanka Coast Guard (SLCG), and Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) Coast Guard from 17–19 January 2026.
- ★ India's delegation is led by Director General Paramesh Sivamani, while Sri Lanka is represented by Admiral Rohan Joseph, DG of SLCG.
- ★ The harbour phase of the exercise was held from 17–19 January 2026, followed by an operational sea phase.
- ★ During the harbour phase, the exercise focused on MARPOL-based marine pollution response drills, promoting reciprocal learning and strengthening operational capabilities among participants.
- ★ The exercise conducted joint Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) drills and developed cross-boarding Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to enhance coordination.
- ★ Activities included live demonstrations of pollution response equipment and tabletop exercises.
- ★ In the sea phase, ICG ships (including ICGS Vajra and ICGS Atulya) and aircraft (ICG Dornier) participated alongside the Sri Lankan ship SLNS Suranimila to test operational coordination in open-sea conditions.
- ★ The phase focused on search and rescue (SAR) missions and tactical maritime security drills to address non-traditional security challenges.
- ★ The exercise supports India's SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in the Region) vision and Neighbourhood First policy, fostering regional maritime co-operation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Bharat Forge Aerospace Division Bags ₹300 Crore Contracts for Indigenous Unmanned Systems

- ★ Bharat Forge Limited (BFL)'s aerospace division secured contracts worth nearly ₹300 crore under the Emergency Procurement-VI (EP-VI) framework for the supply of indigenously built unmanned systems to the Indian Army (IA) and Indian Navy (IN).
- ★ Under the EP-VI framework, the total value of each contract is capped at ₹300 crore, with equipment delivery required within one year of signing.

- ★ Key Platforms covered under the contracts include Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, such as Omega One and Omega Nine ISR drones, and loitering munitions named Bayonet and Cleaver.
- ★ Omega One was displayed during Army Day (January 15, 2026) in Jaipur, Rajasthan, mounted on an upgraded BMP-2 infantry combat vehicle, providing short to medium-range battlefield surveillance.
- ★ Omega Nine is a high-endurance ISR drone, designed for long-duration missions, to detect enemy presence, identify targets, and enhance situational awareness.
- ★ Loitering munitions like Bayonet and Cleaver are 'kamikaze drones', which hover over a target, identify critical assets, and strike with precision.
- ★ These indigenous unmanned systems are developed to meet urgent operational requirements of India across diverse terrains and mission profiles.

Uttarakhand Government Signs MoU with ITBP

- ★ The Uttarakhand Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) under a new initiative named 'Swasth Seema Abhiyan' to improve healthcare facilities in remote border villages of the state.
- ★ The MoU was signed in the presence of Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami at his residence. Health Minister Dr Dhan Singh Rawat and Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bahuguna were also present, along with senior officials from the State Government and ITBP.
- ★ Under this initiative, integrated primary healthcare services will be provided to 108 border villages located in Pithoragarh, Chamoli and Uttarkashi districts, which are difficult and hard-to-reach areas.
- ★ The programme will be implemented in phases, starting with the most remote villages.
- ★ As per the agreement, ITBP Headquarters (Northern Frontier), Dehradun will act as the first party, while the Medical Health and Family Welfare Department, Uttarakhand will be the second party.
- ★ ITBP will deploy trained doctors and paramedical staff in the border villages and provide medical services through existing MI rooms and telemedicine facilities.
- ★ Regular medical visits will be conducted in selected villages, health cards will be issued to beneficiaries, and medical records will be maintained.
- ★ ITBP will be responsible for management of medical equipment, medicines and consumables.
- ★ The State Government will initially provide essential medical equipment and ensure the continuous supply of medicines every six months.
- ★ Since November 2024, ITBP has been purchasing local produce on a trial basis, with full-scale procurement starting from March 2025.
- ★ So far, local purchases worth ₹11.94 crore have been made.
- ★ Overall, Swasth Seema Abhiyan reflects the State Government's focus on strengthening healthcare, boosting the rural economy, and ensuring long-term development of border villages through close coordination with the ITBP.

Indian Army Partnered with Indian Institute of Science Bengaluru

- ★ The Indian Army (IA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru (Karnataka) to jointly develop a fully indigenous Artificial Intelligence (AI) system.
- ★ The objective of the MoU is to address emerging challenges in digital information and modern warfare through advanced AI-based solutions.
- ★ The AI system will be developed through collaborative research, innovation, and field-oriented testing, ensuring alignment with the operational requirements of the armed forces.
- ★ The project involves a tripartite collaboration integrating the operational experience of the Indian Army, academic expertise of IISc, and the innovation of the Indian industry, including the startup Indy Astra.
- ★ The initiative strengthens self-reliance in defence technology, reinforcing the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- ★ The MoU reaffirms the Indian Army's commitment towards building a self-reliant India through indigenous AI development.
- ★ The collaboration aims to enhance India's indigenous defence innovation ecosystem by combining institutional experience, research excellence, and industry participation.

India and European Union Sign First-Ever Comprehensive Defence and Security Partnership

- ★ India and the European Union signed their first comprehensive Defence and Security Partnership, alongside the conclusion of the India–European Union Free Trade Agreement.
- ★ The agreement was signed during the visit of European Union leaders to India for the 77th Republic Day celebrations, marking a historic expansion of bilateral ties beyond trade.
- ★ This is the first-ever overarching defence and security agreement between India and the European Union, reflecting a major strategic milestone in bilateral relations.
- ★ The partnership establishes a formal and comprehensive framework for co-operation in maritime security, defence industry, defence technology, and space security.
- ★ The agreement signals that India and the European Union now view each other as reliable and long-term security partners in a volatile global security environment.
- ★ Alongside the defence partnership, both sides launched negotiations on a Security of Information Agreement.
- ★ The Security of Information Agreement will enable the exchange of classified information while ensuring legal safeguards for the protection of sensitive data.
- ★ This agreement is a mandatory framework for the European Union to share classified material with third countries and is expected to strengthen defence-industrial and strategic co-operation.
- ★ The partnership reflects shared concerns over rising cross-regional security threats, increasing focus on Indo-Pacific maritime security, and evolving global geopolitical tensions.

- ★ The European Union's growing defence preparedness, particularly amid concerns related to Russia and Ukraine, aligns with India's push for defence self-reliance and diversification of strategic partners.
- ★ Both sides acknowledged the need for closer co-operation to counter terrorism, hybrid threats, and cyber insecurity.
- ★ India and the European Union also adopted the "Towards 2030: India-European Union Joint Comprehensive Strategic Agenda" to provide long-term direction to bilateral co-operation.

RANKS, INDICES & REPORTS

Tracxn Report: India Creates 5 Unicorns as 111 Emerge Worldwide in 2025

- ★ According to the Tracxn India Tech Annual Funding Report 2025, India added 5 new unicorns in 2025, while 111 unicorns were created globally during the year.
- ★ The five new Indian unicorns in 2025 are Navi (financial services), Jumbotail (B2B grocery), JSW One MSME (retail steel platform), Juspay (digital payments), and Raise Financial Services (parent company of Dhan).
- ★ On average, Indian start-ups took 5.8 years to grow from Series A funding to unicorn status.
- ★ Before attaining unicorn status, Indian start-ups raised an average of USD 149 million in funding.
- ★ India currently has 124 unicorns, which account for around 6% of the global unicorn ecosystem.
- ★ India ranks third globally in terms of the number of unicorns, after the United States (1,104 unicorns) and China (249 unicorns).
- ★ The Indian unicorn ecosystem is highly concentrated in Bengaluru (52 unicorns), followed by Gurugram (20) and Mumbai (19).
- ★ Other emerging unicorn hubs in India include Chennai and Pune, with 7 unicorns each, as per the Tracxn report.

Responsible Nations Index to be Launched in New Delhi

- ★ A new global assessment framework named the Responsible Nations Index will be launched on January 19.
- ★ The index will be released by the World Intellectual Foundation.
- ★ The launch event will take place in New Delhi in the presence of former President of India Ram Nath Kovind.
- ★ The initiative comes at a time when countries face shared challenges related to sustainability, governance and global stability.
- ★ The Responsible Nations Index is a global index designed to evaluate how responsibly countries function in an interconnected world.
- ★ It covers 154 countries, making it one of the broadest international indices in terms of scope.

- ★ The index is built using transparent and globally sourced data, ensuring credibility and cross-country comparability.
- ★ Its objective is to encourage nations to focus not only on economic growth but also on social justice, environmental protection and global co-operation.
- ★ By identifying strengths and gaps, the index aims to promote responsible governance worldwide.
- ★ The index is structured around three core dimensions.
- ★ Internal responsibility focuses on dignity, justice and overall well-being of citizens.
- ★ The launch of the index is supported by leading Indian institutions such as Jawaharlal Nehru University, Indian Institute of Management Mumbai, and the Dr Ambedkar International Centre.
- ★ These collaborations add academic depth and policy relevance to the initiative.

Henley Passport Index 2026

- ★ The Henley Passport Index 2026 has ranked India at 80th position globally, reflecting a modest improvement in international travel access.
- ★ Indian passport holders now have visa-free, visa-on-arrival or e-visa access to 55 destinations, improving from 85th rank last year.
- ★ Despite this progress, significant visa restrictions remain for major destinations such as Europe and North America, continuing to shape Indian travel planning.
- ★ The Henley Passport Index is published by Henley & Partners and is considered the global benchmark for passport strength.
- ★ It ranks passports based on the number of destinations accessible without a prior visa or with visa-on-arrival.
- ★ The index uses exclusive data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), making it one of the most credible measures of global mobility.
- ★ The 2026 edition evaluates 277 countries and territories, including sovereign states, regions and special administrative zones.
- ★ This wide coverage allows for a comprehensive and comparative assessment of international travel freedom.
- ★ India's 80th rank places it alongside Nigeria and Algeria.
- ★ Regional neighbours Bangladesh and Pakistan rank lower than India, highlighting a mobility gap within South Asia.
- ★ The rankings underline the contrast between India and advanced economies with stronger passport power.
- ★ Singapore holds the world's most powerful passport, with access to 192 destinations.
- ★ Japan and South Korea jointly rank second, allowing access to 188 destinations, reflecting strong diplomacy and global trust.
- ★ European countries dominate the top ranks, with several European Union nations offering access to over 185 destinations, showcasing the strength of European integration.

- ★ Afghanistan ranks 101st, holding the weakest passport in the world, with access to only 24 destinations.

Abu Dhabi Ranked World's Safest City for 10th Consecutive Year

- ★ Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, has been ranked the world's safest city for the 10th consecutive year in an international safety ranking released by Numbeo, reaffirming its global reputation for security and high quality of life.
- ★ The global safety ranking is released by Numbeo, a well-known international database that compares cities based on crime rates, public safety perception, law enforcement efficiency, and overall quality of life.
- ★ The index is based on user-contributed data, surveys, and crime statistics.
- ★ Abu Dhabi has topped this ranking continuously since 2017, reflecting long-term consistency in governance and public safety policies.
- ★ Abu Dhabi is considered the safest city due to its low crime rates, strict enforcement of laws, and proactive policing.
- ★ The city makes extensive use of advanced surveillance systems, smart city technologies, and rapid emergency response mechanisms, which significantly enhance public safety.
- ★ Political stability, strong social cohesion, and high public trust in institutions further contribute to a secure living environment.

Responsible Nations Index Launched by Ram Nath Kovind in New Delhi

- ★ Former President Ram Nath Kovind officially launched the Responsible Nations Index (RNI) in New Delhi, introducing a new global framework to assess countries based on responsibility rather than power or wealth.
- ★ The Responsible Nations Index (RNI) is a global evaluative framework designed to measure how responsibly countries behave towards their citizens, the environment, and the global intellectual community.
- ★ Unlike traditional indices focused on GDP, military strength, or influence, the RNI emphasises ethical governance, human-centric policies, inclusive development, and sustainable progress.
- ★ The index aims to encourage nations to adopt moral responsibility in policymaking, ensuring that development benefits society as a whole.
- ★ By redefining benchmarks of national success, RNI promotes a balanced, humane, and sustainable model of global development.
- ★ The RNI has been developed by the World Intellectual Foundation in academic collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).
- ★ This partnership combines policy research and academic expertise, strengthening the credibility, analytical depth, and evidence-based assessment of the index.

India Ranked 6th in Asia Manufacturing Index 2026

- ★ India has been placed 6th among 11 Asian countries in the Asia Manufacturing Index 2026, showing moderate progress but also revealing gaps in manufacturing competitiveness.

- ★ India ranked sixth in the Asia Manufacturing Index 2026, highlighting intensifying competition in Asia and the need for faster and deeper manufacturing reforms.
- ★ The Asia Manufacturing Index (AMI) is an annual assessment released by Dezan Shira & Associates, a pan-Asian advisory firm headquartered in Hong Kong.
- ★ The index evaluates manufacturing competitiveness using eight key pillars: economy, political risk, business environment, international trade, tax policy, infrastructure, workforce, and innovation.
- ★ These pillars are further divided into 43 sub-parameters, providing a data-driven comparison of manufacturing readiness and long-term potential across Asia.
- ★ India's 6th position places it in the mid-tier of Asian manufacturing economies.
- ★ India's strengths include a large domestic market, improving infrastructure, and a growing workforce.
- ★ However, India lags behind leading economies in execution speed, policy stability, and depth of innovation.
- ★ The index emphasizes the need for continued focus on ease of doing business, logistics efficiency, skill development, and technology adoption to improve future rankings.
- ★ China retained the top position in the Asia Manufacturing Index 2026 due to its scale, strong infrastructure, and integrated supply chains.
- ★ Malaysia ranked second for the first time, overtaking Vietnam, which slipped to third place.
- ★ Among developed economies, Singapore climbed to fourth position, surpassing South Korea, which fell to fifth.
- ★ These ranking shifts underline growing competition in Asia, with countries actively reforming policies and upgrading infrastructure to attract global manufacturing investment.

AWARDS & PRIZES

Israel to Confer Israel Prize for Peace 2026 on Donald Trump

- ★ Israel has announced a special peace honour for former United States President Donald Trump, marking a significant diplomatic development.
- ★ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Trump will be awarded the Israel Prize for Peace in 2026 following a high-profile meeting with Israeli leadership in Florida.
- ★ This decision comes shortly after Trump was overlooked for the Nobel Peace Prize, highlighting Israel's independent recognition of his role in peace initiatives and bilateral relations.
- ★ The Israel Prize is Israel's highest civilian honour, traditionally awarded to Israeli citizens for exceptional contributions in science, culture and society.
- ★ This announcement is historic as it is the first time in 80 years that the Israel Prize will be awarded to a non-Israeli, and also marks the first-ever introduction of a Peace category under the Israel Prize.

- ★ The move represents a deliberate departure from long-standing convention, which Netanyahu described as a conscious decision to “break tradition”.
- ★ According to the Israeli Prime Minister, the award reflects the overwhelming sentiment across Israel’s political spectrum in appreciation of Trump’s contributions.
- ★ Key reasons cited include strong support for Israel’s security, active role in Middle East peace efforts, and diplomatic initiatives that facilitated a Gaza peace deal.
- ★ The honour also recognises Trump’s role in efforts linked to the release of the last surviving hostages taken during the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks.
- ★ The announcement reinforces Trump’s international profile in peace diplomacy and underscores continued strategic alignment between Israel and the United States, extending beyond electoral cycles.

Pawan Kalyan Becomes First Indian Inducted into Samurai Kenjutsu Tradition

- ★ Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has become the first Indian to be formally inducted into Kenjutsu, an ancient Japanese samurai swordsmanship tradition.
- ★ This honour is extremely rare for non-Japanese practitioners and is usually conferred only in exceptional cases outside Japan, highlighting its global significance.
- ★ The induction places Pawan Kalyan among a select group of international practitioners, reflecting India’s growing presence in global cultural and martial traditions.
- ★ Kenjutsu is a classical Japanese martial art rooted in samurai warfare techniques and philosophy.
- ★ It emphasises discipline, precision, mental balance, ethical conduct and respect for tradition.
- ★ Traditionally, Kenjutsu training and recognition are restricted to Japan, making foreign induction highly uncommon.
- ★ Pawan Kalyan’s induction signifies technical mastery as well as acceptance into a centuries-old cultural lineage of samurai heritage.
- ★ With this recognition, Pawan Kalyan joins a very small group of Indians inducted into samurai martial traditions outside Japan.
- ★ Earlier, Pawan Kalyan was also inducted into the Takeda Shingen Clan, a historically significant samurai lineage.
- ★ This honour was conferred under the guidance of Soke Muramatsu Sensei, making him the first Telugu-speaking individual to receive such recognition.

Karnataka Bank Wins IBA Banking Technology Award 2026

- ★ Karnataka Bank emerged as the winner in the ‘Best Fintech & Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Adoption’ category at the Indian Banks’ Association (IBA) Banking Technology Awards 2026.
- ★ The recognition highlights the bank’s strong focus on fintech innovation, digital banking solutions, and adoption of Digital Public Infrastructure in India’s evolving banking ecosystem.

- ★ The award reflects Karnataka Bank's effective integration of digital payments, online banking platforms, and backend technology systems, aligned with regulatory standards and customer-centric requirements.
- ★ In addition to the main award, Karnataka Bank was adjudged runner-up in the 'Best Tech Talent' category, underscoring its emphasis on building skilled digital and information technology teams.
- ★ The bank also received Special Mention in multiple categories, including Best Technology Bank, Best Digital Financial Inclusion, and Best Digital Sales, indicating balanced performance across innovation, inclusion, and customer outreach.
- ★ Digital Public Infrastructure, such as Unified Payments Interface, Aadhaar, and digital Know Your Customer systems, forms the backbone of India's financial ecosystem, enabling efficiency, inclusion, and cost reduction.
- ★ Karnataka Bank's recognition demonstrates how traditional banks can successfully leverage fintech and DPI to remain agile, inclusive, and technologically advanced.
- ★ The IBA Banking Technology Awards are organised annually by the Indian Banks' Association to recognise excellence in digital transformation, innovation, cybersecurity, and technology adoption in the banking sector, making them relevant from a competitive examinations perspective.

Biologist Toby Kiers Wins Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement

- ★ American evolutionary biologist Toby Kiers has won the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement for her groundbreaking research on underground mycorrhizal fungal networks and their role in climate regulation and ecosystem stability.
- ★ Her work has transformed the scientific understanding of fungi, shifting their image from passive organisms to active drivers of planetary health.
- ★ Mycorrhizal fungal networks are vast underground systems that connect plant roots across forests, grasslands, and farmlands.
- ★ In this symbiotic relationship, plants provide fungi with carbon-rich sugars and fats produced through photosynthesis.
- ★ In return, fungi supply plants with essential nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen from the soil.
- ★ These networks function at a massive ecosystem scale, linking plants into shared systems that enhance growth, resilience, and survival.
- ★ Kiers' research revealed that mycorrhizal fungi play a major role in regulating Earth's climate.
- ★ Collectively, these fungi draw down more than 13 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide every year, storing carbon in soils and plant systems.
- ★ In a landmark 2011 study, Kiers demonstrated that fungi operate within a biological marketplace.
- ★ Experiments showed that fungi allocate nutrients strategically, moving them from areas of abundance to areas of scarcity.
- ★ They also demand higher carbon rewards from plants that need nutrients the most.
- ★ Notably, this complex negotiation occurs without a brain or nervous system, challenging traditional ideas about intelligence and information processing in living systems.

- ★ The Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement is one of the world's most prestigious environmental awards, often referred to as the "Nobel Prize for the Environment".

Indian Railways' Highest Award for Child Trafficking Prevention

- ★ Railway Protection Force (RPF) Officer Chandana Sinha has been conferred Indian Railways' highest award for her exceptional contribution to preventing child trafficking and rescuing vulnerable children at railway stations and trains.
- ★ Chandana Sinha is a senior RPF Officer known for her ground-level, child-centric approach to safety across railway premises.
- ★ She focused not only on enforcement but on identification, rescue, and rehabilitation of trafficked and runaway children.
- ★ Her work involved close coordination with Non-Governmental Organisations, Child Welfare Committees, and State authorities, strengthening institutional response to trafficking.
- ★ Railway stations and trains are frequently used by traffickers due to high passenger volume and anonymity, making the Railways a critical intervention point.
- ★ The Railway Protection Force plays a frontline role in detecting suspicious movement of minors, and officers like Chandana Sinha enhanced surveillance, staff training, and early intervention mechanisms.
- ★ She emphasized early identification of children travelling alone or under suspicious supervision, preventing exploitation before it occurred.
- ★ She helped institutionalise child-friendly protocols within the RPF, ensuring rescued children were treated as victims rather than offenders.
- ★ Her initiatives improved inter-agency coordination, enabling faster rescues and safe handover to welfare institutions, leading to a reduction in trafficking cases on high-risk routes.
- ★ The Indian Railways' highest award is given for exceptional service and outstanding contribution, recognising both operational excellence and humanitarian impact.
- ★ By honouring an RPF Officer for child protection work, Indian Railways highlighted social responsibility as a core institutional value alongside safety and efficiency.
- ★ Chandana Sinha's work has strengthened the role of Indian Railways as a key stakeholder in child protection and is expected to motivate wider adoption of similar practices.

C-DOT Wins SKOCH Award 2025 for Cell Broadcast Solution

- ★ The Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) has received the SKOCH Award 2025 at the 104th SKOCH Summit for its Cell Broadcast Solution (CBS), a national disaster and emergency alerting platform.
- ★ The Cell Broadcast Solution developed by C-DOT is an advanced system designed to deliver real-time, life-saving disaster alerts directly to mobile phones in geo-targeted areas through cellular networks.
- ★ Unlike SMS, cell broadcast messages reach all devices instantly, even during network congestion, making it highly effective during emergencies.

- ★ The platform integrates multiple disaster alert generation agencies on a single unified system, including the India Meteorological Department (weather alerts), Central Water Commission (floods), Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (tsunamis), Directorate General of Resettlement Engineering (landslides), and Forest Survey of India (forest fires).
- ★ Alerts are approved by the State Disaster Management Authorities and the National Disaster Management Authority, and then broadcast by all mobile operators.
- ★ The Cell Broadcast Solution is fully indigenous, automated, and cost-effective. It supports multi-hazard alerts and delivers messages in 21 Indian languages, ensuring wide inclusivity.
- ★ The system provides near real-time warnings, helping citizens take timely action and reducing loss of life and property, thereby strengthening disaster risk reduction and management across India.
- ★ C-DOT's solution aligns with the United Nations' "Early Warnings for All" (EW4All) initiative and follows the International Telecommunication Union's Common Alerting Protocol (CAP).
- ★ It also contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals by enhancing disaster resilience and places India among a select group of global technology providers offering advanced cell broadcast systems, supporting the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
- ★ The SKOCH Award recognises outstanding contributions by government and private institutions in governance and development, honouring impactful work in areas such as technology, finance, health, education, and innovation.

Ilaiyaraaja to Receive Padmapani Award

- ★ Renowned music maestro Ilaiyaraaja has been selected for the Padmapani Award, which will be conferred at the 11th Ajanta–Ellora International Film Festival in early 2026.
- ★ The Padmapani Award is one of the most prestigious honours of the Ajanta–Ellora International Film Festival and is presented to individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to cinema and the arts.
- ★ The award includes a Padmapani memento, a citation certificate, and a cash prize of ₹2 lakh, symbolising artistic excellence and cultural impact.
- ★ Ilaiyaraaja is regarded as one of the greatest composers in Indian cinema. With a career spanning over four decades, he has composed music for more than 1,000 films across multiple Indian languages.
- ★ His innovative fusion of Western classical techniques with Indian folk and classical music transformed Indian film music and influenced generations of musicians and composers.
- ★ The Ajanta–Ellora International Film Festival is a prominent cultural event celebrating world cinema and Indian artistic excellence.
- ★ The 11th edition will be held from 28 January to 1 February 2026 at Mahatma Gandhi Mission, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, and serves as a platform for filmmakers, artists, and scholars to exchange ideas and showcase meaningful cinema.
- ★ The festival is organised with the support of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Department of Cultural Affairs, Maharashtra, and is co-presented by the National Film Development Corporation and the Maharashtra Film, Stage and Cultural Development Corporation, highlighting its national cultural significance.

Karnataka Bank Wins National-Level Technology Award

- ★ Karnataka Bank won the 'Best Fintech and DPI Adoption' award at the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) Banking Technology Awards 2026, recognising its excellence in digital banking and technology adoption.
- ★ The award highlights the bank's strong integration of fintech solutions and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including digital payments, online banking services, and backend system efficiency.
- ★ The bank was also runner-up in the 'Best Tech Talent' category, reflecting its focus on building skilled IT and digital teams.
- ★ Karnataka Bank received Special Mentions in categories such as Best Technology Bank, Best Digital Financial Inclusion, and Best Digital Sales, showing consistent performance across innovation, inclusion, and customer outreach.
- ★ Effective use of DPI platforms like UPI, Aadhaar, and digital KYC positions banks to improve operational efficiency, expand financial inclusion, and reduce transaction costs.
- ★ The recognition underscores how traditional banks can leverage technology and innovation to stay competitive and customer-centric in India's rapidly digitising banking ecosystem.
- ★ IBA Banking Technology Awards are annual awards recognising excellence in digital transformation, cybersecurity, fintech innovation, and technology adoption in the banking sector.

Tamil Nadu Announces Semmozhi Illakiya Virudhu

- ★ Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced a new annual state-sponsored literary award named "Semmozhi Illakiya Virudhu (Classical Language Literary Award)" during the valedictory ceremony of the Chennai International Book Fair.
- ★ The award will have a national-level character and will recognise outstanding literary works in major Indian languages other than Hindi, highlighting India's linguistic diversity and inclusive cultural policy.
- ★ Each selected language will carry a cash prize of ₹5 lakh, making it one of the highest-value state-backed literary honours in India.
- ★ In the first phase, the award will recognise best literary works in seven Indian languages: Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Bengali, and Marathi. The government has indicated that more languages may be included in future phases.
- ★ The initiative aims to strengthen multilingual literature, with the Chief Minister emphasising that language should act as a bridge, not a barrier, and that national unity is reinforced through linguistic diversity.
- ★ The award is designed as a structured annual honour, reflecting Tamil Nadu's effort to institutionalise state support for literature, similar to support extended to sports, science, and innovation.
- ★ The announcement comes amid concerns over uncertainty surrounding Sahitya Akademi awards, with allegations of interference by the Union Culture Ministry in the cancellation of award announcements.

- ★ To ensure independence and transparency, the Tamil Nadu Government will act only as a patron, not as a selector. Separate expert committees will be formed for each language, comprising reputed writers and literary experts, to select awardees.

Mozambique's Graca Machel Awarded Indira Gandhi Peace Prize 2025

- ★ Graca Machel, a renowned human rights activist from Mozambique, has been awarded the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development 2025.
- ★ The award was announced by the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust in recognition of her lifelong contributions to education, child welfare, women's empowerment, humanitarian work, peace, and social justice, particularly in conflict-affected regions.
- ★ The Indira Gandhi Prize is one of India's most prestigious international honours, awarded to individuals or organisations for outstanding contributions to peace, development, and social justice.
- ★ The award carries a cash prize of ₹1 crore, along with a trophy and a citation.
- ★ Graca Machel was selected by an international jury chaired by former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon.
- ★ In 1973, Graca Machel returned to Mozambique and joined FRELIMO (Mozambican Liberation Front) as a freedom fighter and teacher.
- ★ The United Nations appointed her to lead a landmark study on children affected by armed conflict.
- ★ Her 1996 report, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children", reshaped international policies and strengthened protection mechanisms for children in war zones.
- ★ For her global humanitarian efforts, she received the UN Nansen Refugee Award and was appointed Honorary Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 1997.
- ★ Graca Machel is a founding member of The Elders, a group of global leaders working for peace, justice, and human rights.
- ★ She also co-founded Girls Not Brides, an international NGO working to end child marriage worldwide.
- ★ She is currently a member of the UN Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Advocacy Group.
- ★ In 2010, she established the Graca Machel Trust, focusing on women's economic empowerment, food security, leadership, and good governance in Africa.
- ★ Graca Machel was married to Samora Machel, the first President of Mozambique, who died in 1986.
- ★ By conferring the Indira Gandhi Peace Prize 2025 on Graca Machel, India has honoured a global icon whose life's work represents peace, human dignity, and inclusive development, continuing to inspire generations worldwide.

Sikkim Police Conferred with President's Police Colour Award

- ★ Sikkim Police has been awarded the President's Police Colour (Nishaan) for its outstanding service, professionalism, and dedication to duty.

- ★ With this honour, Sikkim becomes the 15th state in India and the 3rd state from the North-East to receive this prestigious recognition since Independence.
- ★ The President's Police Colour Award, popularly known as the Nishaan, is a ceremonial honour granted to police forces for exceptional service, bravery, discipline, and professionalism.
- ★ The award is symbolised by a flag and insignia, which is worn on the left sleeve of the police uniform.
- ★ It recognises the collective performance, legacy, and sustained excellence of an entire police force rather than individual acts.
- ★ Receiving the President's Police Colour is a landmark achievement for the Sikkim Police.
- ★ Since Independence, only 14 states had received this honour earlier, underlining its rarity and prestige.
- ★ The recognition places Sikkim among an elite group of states known for high standards of integrity, efficiency, and public trust in policing.
- ★ It highlights the role of Sikkim Police in maintaining law and order in a sensitive border state with professionalism and restraint.
- ★ Sikkim is now the third North-Eastern state to receive the President's Police Colour Award.
- ★ It also reinforces the Central Government's emphasis on strengthening institutions, morale, and security in border and hill states.

Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya Wins Wiley Research Heroes Prize 2025

- ★ Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya, an Indian doctor and public health expert, has won the Wiley Research Heroes Prize 2025.
- ★ He became the first Indian to receive this global honour in the Impact Beyond Academia category.
- ★ The award recognises researchers whose work is inclusive, innovative, and impactful, ensuring research influences public policy and real-world outcomes beyond academic publications.
- ★ The 2025 edition of the prize received over 2,000 nominations globally, from which only five researchers were selected.
- ★ Dr. Lahariya was selected for his sustained contribution to public health policy and implementation.
- ★ He is a former staff member of the World Health Organization and has worked at the intersection of research, governance, and public health policy.
- ★ His work has helped governments translate scientific evidence into practical health interventions.
- ★ He is a health policy researcher, academician, and medical practitioner.

Taylor Swift to be Inducted into Songwriters Hall of Fame

- ★ Taylor Swift (aged 36) will become the second-youngest songwriter to be inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.
- ★ She joins Stevie Wonder, who was inducted at the age of 33 in 1983, as the youngest inductees in the Hall of Fame's history.

- ★ The announcement was made by the Songwriters Hall of Fame and confirmed on CBS Mornings.
- ★ Taylor Swift will be inducted alongside: Alanis Morissette, Kenny Loggins and Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons (members of the band Kiss).
- ★ The induction ceremony is scheduled to be held on 11 June 2026 at the Marriott Marquis Hotel, New York City.
- ★ Established in 1969, the Songwriters Hall of Fame requires that songwriters become eligible 20 years after the first commercial release of a song, with a significant and influential catalogue.

Republic Day Parade 2026

- ★ The results of the Best Marching Contingents and Best Tableaux of the Republic Day Parade 2026 were announced after evaluation by three separate panels of judges.
- ★ Among the three Services, the Indian Navy was selected as the Best Marching Contingent, while Delhi Police won the award among CAPFs/Other Auxiliary Forces.
- ★ The top three tableaux from States/UTs were Maharashtra (Ganeshotsav: A Symbol of Aatmanirbharta), Jammu & Kashmir (Handicrafts and Folk Dances of J&K), and Kerala (Water Metro & 100% Digital Literacy).
- ★ The Best Tableau from Central Ministries/Departments award was won by the Ministry of Culture for “Vande Mataram – The Soul Cry of a Nation”.
- ★ Special prizes were awarded to the Central Public Works Department for “Vande Mataram – Commemoration of 150 Years” and the dance group “Vande Mataram: The Eternal Resonance of India”.
- ★ Under the Popular Choice category, based on the MyGov online poll, the Assam Regiment was selected as the Best Marching Contingent among Services.
- ★ In the Popular Choice category, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) won the award among CAPFs.
- ★ The top three Popular Choice tableaux were Gujarat (Mantra of Swadeshi – Vande Mataram), Uttar Pradesh (Culture of Bundelkhand), and Rajasthan (Bikaner Gold Art – Usta Art), while the Department of School Education and Literacy won the Best Central Tableau for showcasing National Education Policy 2020.

NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang Awarded 2026 IEEE Medal of Honor, Technology's Most Prestigious Recognition

- ★ IEEE, the world's largest technical professional organization with over 500,000 members, has named Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of NVIDIA, as the recipient of the 2026 IEEE Medal of Honor.
- ★ The IEEE Medal of Honor is the organization's highest recognition and carries a \$2 million prize.
- ★ Jensen Huang is being honoured for a lifetime of visionary leadership and pioneering work in accelerated computing.
- ★ His work has positioned NVIDIA at the forefront of global technological innovation.
- ★ Under his leadership, NVIDIA invented the first graphics processing unit (GPU) in 1999, revolutionising computing.

- ★ The invention of the GPU enabled breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, medicine, engineering, robotics, autonomous vehicles and manufacturing.
- ★ Past recipients include pioneers such as Vinton G. Cerf, Robert Kahn, Bradford Parkinson and Morris Chang.
- ★ NVIDIA became the first company to reach a \$5 trillion market capitalisation in October 2025.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Interim Director General of National Investigation Agency

- ★ The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) approved the appointment of Rakesh Agarwal (IPS) as the Interim Director General (DG) of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- ★ Rakesh Agarwal will serve as Interim DG of NIA until a full-time Director General is appointed.
- ★ The appointment follows the premature repatriation of Sadanand Vasant Date, the former DG of NIA, to his parent cadre in Maharashtra.
- ★ Rakesh Agarwal is a 1994-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) Officer from the Himachal Pradesh cadre.
- ★ He has been serving as Special Director General (SDG), NIA since September 2025.
- ★ He is recognized for his expertise in counter-terrorism, terror financing, and organized crime investigations.

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Canara Bank

- ★ Canara Bank has assigned additional charge of Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer (MD and CEO) to Hardeep Singh Ahluwalia, with effect from January 1, 2026.
- ★ The decision follows the superannuation of former MD & CEO K. Satyanarayana Raju on December 31, 2025.
- ★ The arrangement is temporary in nature, valid for three months (until March 31, 2026) or until a regular MD and CEO is appointed, whichever is earlier, as per the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance notification dated December 30, 2025.
- ★ Separately, the Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) has recommended Brajesh Kumar Singh as the next regular MD & CEO of Canara Bank, following interviews of 17 candidates.
- ★ Brajesh Kumar Singh is currently serving as the Executive Director of Indian Bank.

Chairman of ESAF Small Finance Bank

- ★ ESAF Small Finance Bank, headquartered in Thrissur, Kerala, appointed Karthikeyan Manickam as its Chairman, strengthening the bank's leadership.
- ★ Karthikeyan Manickam brings over 36 years of experience in public sector banking, having previously served as Executive Director of Bank of India (BoI).

- ★ During his banking career, he held several senior leadership positions at Indian Bank, gaining extensive operational and managerial expertise.
- ★ He has served as a Board Member of Tamil Nadu Grama Bank and BOI STAR Investment Managers Pvt. Ltd., contributing to governance and strategic oversight.
- ★ He also served as Chairman of Star Union Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company Limited (SUD Life), adding experience in the insurance and financial services sector.

Additional Charge as Director General of National Investigation Agency

- ★ The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) assigned Rakesh Aggarwal, a 1994-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) Officer from the Himachal Pradesh cadre, the additional charge of Director General (DG) of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) following the early repatriation of Sadanand Vasant Date.
- ★ Rakesh Aggarwal, who is currently serving as Special DG of the NIA, will act as the Interim Chief to ensure continuity and stability in India's premier counter-terrorism agency, while overseeing ongoing sensitive investigations.
- ★ The MHA order states that Aggarwal will hold the additional charge of NIA DG until a regular DG is appointed or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- ★ Aggarwal was appointed as Special Director General of the NIA on 29 September 2025, on an in-situ basis, by temporarily upgrading his Additional Director General (ADG) post for a two-year tenure or until further orders.
- ★ The decision followed the approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) for the premature repatriation of Sadanand Date, a 1990-batch Maharashtra cadre IPS Officer, to his parent cadre with immediate effect.
- ★ Sadanand Date is expected to assume charge as the Director General of Police (DGP) of Maharashtra, as the incumbent 1988-batch IPS Officer Rashmi Shukla is scheduled to complete her two-year fixed tenure on 31 December 2025.

RBL Bank Appoints Jaideep Iyer as Executive Director and Deepak Ruiya as Interim CFO

- ★ RBL Bank announced key senior management changes, appointing Jaideep Iyer as Executive Director and Deepak Ruiya as interim Chief Financial Officer (CFO) as part of a planned leadership transition.
- ★ As per a stock exchange filing, Jaideep Iyer, currently Head of Strategy, will assume charge as Executive Director for a three-year term starting 21 February 2026.
- ★ Jaideep Iyer will succeed Rajeev Ahuja, who is scheduled to retire on 20 February 2026.
- ★ Earlier, Iyer served as interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of RBL Bank during the 2021–2022 leadership transition period.
- ★ His appointment highlights the Board's focus on internal succession planning, continuity, and stability in top management.
- ★ Deepak Ruiya has been appointed as interim CFO with immediate effect and will continue in the role until a regular CFO is appointed, ensuring uninterrupted financial oversight.

- ★ These appointments come amid broader management changes, including the recent resignation of RBL Bank's digital banking head.

24th Chief Justice of Sikkim High Court

- ★ Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque Ayumantakatha, the senior-most Judge of the Kerala High Court (HC), was sworn in as the 24th Chief Justice (CJ) of the Sikkim High Court.
- ★ The oath of office was administered by Om Prakash Mathur, the Governor of Sikkim, at Lok Bhawan, Gangtok, Sikkim.
- ★ The swearing-in ceremony was attended by Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, his council of ministers, and senior state officials.
- ★ Justice Mustaque succeeded Justice Biswanath Somadder, who retired as Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court on 14 December 2025.
- ★ The appointment of Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque was recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Justice Surya Kant.
- ★ Following the recommendation, the Department of Justice (DoJ) under the Ministry of Law and Justice (MoL&J) announced that the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, approved his appointment under Article 217(1) of the Constitution of India.
- ★ At present, Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai is serving as the Acting Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court.
- ★ Justice A. Muhamed Mustaque was enrolled as an advocate in 1989 and primarily practised in Kannur, appearing before various courts and statutory authorities.
- ★ He was appointed as an Additional Judge of the Kerala High Court in 2014 and became a Permanent Judge in 2016.
- ★ He served as the Acting Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court from July 2024 to September 2024.
- ★ Justice Mustaque also served as the Chairman of the Kerala High Court Computerisation Committee from 18 September 2019 until his elevation as Chief Justice, highlighting his role in judicial digitalisation.

Ida Liu Named Chief Executive Officer of HSBC Private Bank

- ★ HSBC Private Bank appointed Ida Liu as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), effective from January 05, 2026.
- ★ She succeeds Gabriel Castello, who had been serving as the interim CEO since December 2024.
- ★ Ida Liu brings over 25 years of global experience across wealth management, strategic advisory, and business transformation.
- ★ She has extensive expertise in advising Ultra-High-Net-Worth (UHNW) clients on investment, liquidity, and legacy planning.
- ★ Before joining HSBC, she served as the Global Head of Citi Private Bank from 2007.
- ★ During her tenure at Citi Bank, she held several key leadership roles, including Head of Citi Private Bank North America.

- ★ She also served as Head of Citi Private Bank New York (USA).
- ★ Additionally, she led the Asian Clients Group, highlighting her strong international and cross-regional leadership experience.

Appointments Committee of the Cabinet Approves One-Year Extension of Abhishek Dev as APEDA Chairman

- ★ The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved a one-year extension of Abhishek Dev's tenure as Chairman of the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA).
- ★ The extension will be effective from February 8, 2026, and was granted under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I).
- ★ Abhishek Dev is a 2007-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Officer belonging to the Arunachal Pradesh–Goa–Mizoram and Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre.
- ★ He previously served as Director in the Department of Commerce (DoC) under the MoC&I from 2021 to 2023.
- ★ In July 2023, Abhishek Dev was appointed as the Chairman of APEDA.

Chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board

- ★ The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, appointed distinguished scientist A.K. Balasubrahmanian as the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) for a three-year term.
- ★ A.K. Balasubrahmanian succeeded Dr. D.K. Shukla, who completed his tenure on December 31, 2025.
- ★ A.K. Balasubrahmanian has nearly 40 years of experience in the design, development, safety assessment, construction, and commissioning of Nuclear Power Plants (NPPs).
- ★ He previously served as Director (Technical) on the Board of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL).
- ★ He held the position of Chairman of the Project Design Safety Committee for Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR)-based nuclear power plants.
- ★ He also served as a member of the Safety Review Committee for Operating Plants (SARCOP) under the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).
- ★ He contributed to first-of-a-kind nuclear systems with indigenous safety features, promoting self-reliance in nuclear reactor technology.
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Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg Appoints Dina Powell McCormick as President and Vice Chairman

- ★ Mark Zuckerberg, Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Meta Platforms Inc., announced the appointment of Dina Powell McCormick as President and Vice Chairman of Meta to strengthen its Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategy.
- ★ Dina Powell McCormick has over 25 years of experience in global finance, national security, and economic development.
- ★ She worked for 16 years at Goldman Sachs as a partner, management committee member, and head of Global Sovereign Investment Banking.
- ★ She served in public service as Deputy National Security Advisor (NSA) under President Donald Trump and held senior roles in the White House and State Department under President George W. Bush.
- ★ Dina Powell McCormick has held board positions at major corporations, including Meta and Exxon Mobil.

- ★ Her recent role was as Vice Chair, President, and Head of Global Client Services at BDT and MSD Partners.

Abhishek Dev Gets One-Year Extension as APEDA Chairman

- ★ Abhishek Dev has received a one-year extension as Chairman of Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on the proposal of the Department of Commerce.
- ★ As per the DoPT order dated January 5, 2025, his deputation is extended beyond February 8, 2026, or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- ★ Abhishek Dev was initially appointed Chairman of APEDA in July 2023 and has been leading the organisation since then.
- ★ Abhishek Dev is a 2007-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Officer of the AGMUT cadre and previously served as Director of Census Operations at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 2021.

PFRDA Forms 15-Member Panel Under M. S. Sahoo for NPS Payout Framework

- ★ The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA), a statutory body under the Ministry of Finance (MoF), has constituted a 15-member high-level expert committee to formulate a regulatory framework for assured payouts under the National Pension System (NPS).
- ★ The committee is chaired by M.S. Sahoo, former Chairperson of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).
- ★ The initiative aims to strengthen the security of retirement income for NPS subscribers.
- ★ The high-level committee comprises a multidisciplinary panel of 15 experts from law, actuarial science, finance, insurance, capital markets, and academia.
- ★ The committee is authorised to invite external experts or intermediaries as special invitees for consultation and feedback.
- ★ The committee is constituted as a standing advisory body on structured pension payouts under NPS to frame assured payout regulations and enable a smooth accumulation-to-decumulation transition.
- ★ The framework deliberation includes novation and settlement to enable legally enforceable, market-based assurances, and defines operational standards including lock-in periods, fee structures, withdrawal limits, and tax treatment in the NPS payout phase.
- ★ The committee is tasked with establishing risk management, capital adequacy, solvency, and legal safeguards for institutions offering assured payouts.
- ★ It is also responsible for standardising disclosures, preventing mis-selling, clarifying 'assured' versus market-linked returns, and addressing shortcomings of the current annuity-based model.

Rakesh Aggarwal Appointed as National Investigation Agency's Director General

- ★ Rakesh Aggarwal, a 1994-batch IPS Officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre, has been appointed as Director General (DG) of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) until 31 August 2028, the date of his superannuation, or until further orders.

- ★ The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved his appointment following the premature repatriation of former NIA DG Sadanand Vasant Date to his parent cadre, Maharashtra.
- ★ Rakesh Aggarwal previously served as Special DG of NIA from September 2025, after being temporarily upgraded from Additional Director General (ADG) for two years.
- ★ He was also appointed as Interim Chief of NIA in December 2025, before assuming the full DG charge.
- ★ Shatrujeet Singh Kapoor, a 1990-batch IPS Officer of the Haryana cadre, has been appointed as the Director General of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).
- ★ Praveen Kumar, a 1993-batch IPS Officer of the West Bengal cadre, has been appointed as the Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF) until 30 September 2030.
- ★ These appointments are part of a major leadership reshuffle across key internal security agencies of India.

Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of ICICI Bank

- ★ ICICI Bank Limited has re-appointed Sandeep Bakshi as Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for a further two-year term.
- ★ The new tenure of Sandeep Bakshi will be from 04 October 2026 to 03 October 2028.
- ★ The re-appointment is subject to approvals from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), stakeholders, and other statutory authorities, as required.
- ★ Sandeep Bakshi was first appointed as MD and CEO in October 2018, and his previous term was extended till October 2026.
- ★ Before becoming MD & CEO, he served as Whole-Time Director (WTD) and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of ICICI Bank.
- ★ Sandeep Bakshi has been associated with the ICICI Group since 1986 (originally joined ICICI Limited), marking nearly four decades of leadership experience.
- ★ During his career, he has held senior positions across various ICICI Group entities, including ICICI Limited, ICICI Lombard General Insurance, ICICI Bank, and ICICI Prudential Life Insurance.
- ★ Along with Bakshi's re-appointment, the Board of Directors (BoDs) of ICICI Bank has also re-appointed Ajay Kumar Gupta as Executive Director (ED).
- ★ Ajay Kumar Gupta's tenure as Executive Director will be from 27 November 2026 to 26 November 2028, for a two-year period.

Prime Minister of Yemen

- ★ Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) appointed Shaea Muhssin Mohammed Al-Zindani as the new Prime Minister of Yemen on 15 January 2026.
- ★ Shaea Muhssin Mohammed Al-Zindani was serving as Foreign Minister of Yemen (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates) before his elevation as Prime Minister.

- ★ He succeeded Salem bin Braik (Salem Saleh bin Braik), who formally submitted his resignation during a meeting with PLC Chairman Rashad Al-Alimi in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- ★ Shaea Muhssin Mohammed Al-Zindani is a senior Yemeni diplomat and politician, known for his extensive diplomatic experience and role in representing Yemen during a critical political transition.
- ★ In his early career, he served as Deputy Foreign Minister of Yemen in the early 1990s (1990–1991).
- ★ He was appointed Yemen's Ambassador to the United Kingdom (UK) from 1991 to 1994.
- ★ He later served as Yemen's Ambassador to Italy from 2005 to 2010, with concurrent non-resident accreditation to Greece, Serbia, Albania, and San Marino.
- ★ From 2010 onwards, he served as Yemen's Ambassador to Jordan (until 2015) and later as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (2017–2024).
- ★ He also represented Yemen as Ambassador to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) from 2008 to 2010.
- ★ Prior to becoming Prime Minister, he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates from March 2024.

President of Uganda

- ★ Uganda's Electoral Commission declared 81-year-old President Yoweri Museveni of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) as the winner of the 2026 presidential election, securing 71.65% of the votes and a seventh term (2026–2031).
- ★ Opposition leader Bobi Wine, a 43-year-old singer-turned-politician from the National Unity Platform (NUP), secured 24.72% of the vote, reflecting strong support among Uganda's youth population.
- ★ Yoweri Museveni has been Uganda's leader since 1986, making him one of the world's longest-serving heads of government.
- ★ He led a rebellion against dictator Idi Amin in 1979, playing a key role in Uganda's modern political history.
- ★ He became President through Uganda's first direct presidential election in 1996.
- ★ In 2023, he was conferred the Order of Katonga (Nishani ya Katonga), Uganda's highest military honour, for extraordinary heroism.
- ★ He received the Global Peace Award (2018) for contributions to peace in the Great Lakes region and Africa.
- ★ The AfrikaVerein Award (2016) was awarded to him in Berlin for leadership excellence, making him the first African President to receive it.
- ★ He has been awarded Honorary Doctorates by institutions such as the Humphrey School of Public Affairs (USA) and the Latin University of Theology (USA).

Whole-Time Director of HDFC Bank

- ★ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved the continuation of senior leadership at HDFC Bank, ensuring stability at India's largest private sector lender.

- ★ The approval covers the re-appointment of Kaizad Bharucha as Whole-time Director on HDFC Bank's board for a fresh three-year term starting April 19, 2026.
- ★ RBI approval is mandatory for senior bank appointments under India's banking regulations, highlighting regulatory oversight on governance and management continuity.
- ★ Kaizad Bharucha currently serves as Deputy Managing Director, overseeing critical business verticals, strategy execution, risk management, and operational performance.
- ★ The re-appointment aligns with regulators' emphasis on strong corporate governance and stable leadership in the banking sector.

Chairman of IndusInd Bank

- ★ Arijit Basu has been appointed as part-time Chairman of IndusInd Bank, effective January 31, 2026, succeeding Sunil Mehta after the completion of his tenure.
- ★ Arijit Basu has over 42 years of banking experience, including 37 years with State Bank of India (SBI), and retired as Managing Director of SBI in 2020.
- ★ He previously served as MD & CEO of SBI Life Insurance, Chief General Manager at SBI, and CEO of SBI's Japan operations in Tokyo.
- ★ Prior to this appointment, Basu was Chairman of HDB Financial Services but stepped down due to conflict-of-interest norms, as IndusInd Bank is promoted by HDFC entities.
- ★ IndusInd Bank underwent a leadership transition following accounting discrepancies, leading to the resignation of Senior Executives and the appointment of Rajiv Anand as MD and CEO in August 2025.
- ★ Sunil Mehta, chairman since January 2023, informed the board of his desire to step down at the end of his term.
- ★ The chairman's exit follows the bank's largest-ever quarterly loss in FY25 due to a \$230-million scandal involving former CEO Sumant Kathpalia and deputy Arun Khurana, who have since left the company.
- ★ Post-scandal, IndusInd Bank appointed a new Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO), and several other Senior Executives, marking a significant senior leadership restructuring.

Head Coach of India Women's Senior Football Team

- ★ The All India Football Federation (AIFF) has officially appointed Amelia Valverde as the Head Coach of the Indian Senior Women's National Football Team.
- ★ Amelia Valverde, aged 39 years, joined the Indian training camp in Antalya, Turkey, where the Blue Tigresses are preparing for the AFC Women's Asian Cup Australia 2026, scheduled in March 2026.
- ★ She is the longest-serving head coach in the history of the Costa Rican Women's National Team, leading Las Ticas from 2015 to 2023.
- ★ Under her guidance, Costa Rica qualified for the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2015 and 2023, which are the only two World Cup appearances by the nation.

- ★ Amelia Valverde secured several international podium finishes, including Gold at the 2017 Central American Games, Silver at the 2018 Central American and Caribbean (CAC) Games, and Bronze at the 2019 Pan American Games.
- ★ She was honoured as the CONCACAF Female Coach of the Year 2016 for her outstanding coaching achievements.

SPORTS

Youngest Woman to Complete Seven Summits

- ★ Kaamya Karthikeyan, an 18-year-old from Mumbai, became the youngest female in the world to scale the Seven Summits (the highest peaks on all seven continents).
- ★ She is a Class 12 student of Navy Children School, Mumbai, and completed her final summit in Antarctica (Mount Vinson) followed by a trek to the South Pole on December 27, 2025.
- ★ Kaamya has successfully climbed: Mount Kilimanjaro (Africa), Mount Elbrus (Europe), Mount Kosciuszko (Australia), Mount Aconcagua (South America), Mount Denali (North America), Mount Everest (Asia) and Mount Vinson (Antarctica).
- ★ She is the second-youngest female in the world and the youngest Indian to climb Mount Everest from the Nepal side, which she scaled at the age of 16 in May 2024.
- ★ The Indian Navy congratulated her, noting that she is the daughter of a Naval Officer (Commander S. Karthikeyan) and praised her endurance, courage, and resilience.
- ★ Kaamya now aims to become the youngest person to complete the Explorers Grand Slam.
- ★ This ultimate adventure challenge includes climbing the Seven Summits and skiing to both the North and South Poles.

World Blitz Chess Championship 2025

- ★ The World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship 2025 was held in Doha, Qatar, featuring elite players from across the world and delivering high-intensity competition.
- ★ Magnus Carlsen won the World Blitz Chess Championship for a record ninth time, reaffirming his dominance in the fastest format of the game.
- ★ Despite struggling in the round-robin stage with blunders, time trouble, and forfeits, Carlsen showed exceptional experience and mental resilience in the knockout rounds.
- ★ In the final, Carlsen defeated Nodirbek Abdusattorov, later describing the victory as one of the hardest-earned world titles of his career.
- ★ Arjun Erigaisi delivered a strong performance, winning the bronze medal in the Blitz event and emerging as one of the standout players of the tournament.
- ★ Erigaisi topped the league stage among 252 players, losing only one out of 19 games, and registered victories against top players, including Magnus Carlsen.
- ★ A dip in form during the semi-finals denied Erigaisi a chance at the gold medal, resulting in a joint bronze finish.

- ★ Magnus Carlsen and Arjun Erigaisi were the only two players to win two medals each at the Doha championship.
- ★ India finished the tournament with three bronze medals, highlighting its growing strength in global chess.
- ★ Along with Arjun Erigaisi's Rapid and Blitz bronze medals, Koneru Humpy won bronze in the Women's Rapid Championship.
- ★ The performances underlined India's rising stature in international chess and the depth of talent across formats and categories.
- ★ Blitz chess, recognised by the International Chess Federation (FIDE), is a fast-paced format where players get three to five minutes per game, testing speed, intuition, and composure under pressure.

72nd National Volleyball Tournament in Varanasi

- ★ Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will inaugurate the 72nd National Volleyball Tournament through video conferencing.
- ★ The inaugural ceremony will be held at Dr. Sampurnanand Sports Stadium, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
- ★ The tournament will be conducted from 4th to 11th January 2026.
- ★ More than 1,000 players will participate in the tournament.
- ★ A total of 58 teams representing various States and institutions across India will compete in the event.
- ★ The tournament is expected to display high standards of competition, sportsmanship, and emerging talent in Indian volleyball.
- ★ Hosting the 72nd National Volleyball Tournament in Varanasi highlights the increasing focus on sports infrastructure development and promotion of athletics in the city.
- ★ The event further strengthens Varanasi's position as a venue for major national-level sporting and cultural events, in line with its growing role in hosting significant national initiatives.

Vidarbha Wins Maiden Vijay Hazare Trophy

- ★ Vidarbha won their first-ever Vijay Hazare Trophy title, defeating Saurashtra by 38 runs in the final held at the BCCI Centre of Excellence, Bengaluru.
- ★ This victory marked a historic milestone for Vidarbha in India's premier domestic List A (50-over) tournament.
- ★ Vidarbha put up a strong batting performance, posting 317 runs, driven by a match-winning century by opener Atharva Taide, who scored 128 runs.
- ★ It was Taide's finest List A knock and provided a solid foundation in a high-pressure final.
- ★ In reply, Saurashtra were bowled out for 279 in 48.5 overs while chasing 318.
- ★ Prerak Mankad (88) and Chirag Jani (64) offered resistance with a key partnership, but the required run rate increased after their dismissals.

- ★ Vidarbha's disciplined bowling sealed the title, with Yash Thakur picking up four wickets, supported effectively by Nachiket Bhute and Darshan Nalkande.
- ★ The Vijay Hazare Trophy is named after Vijay Hazare and is India's premier domestic one-day competition.
- ★ While Vidarbha have earlier won the Ranji Trophy, this was their first Vijay Hazare Trophy title, highlighting their growing strength in limited-overs cricket.

National Paralympic Powerlifting Championship 2026 Hosted by Uttarakhand

- ★ Uttarakhand hosted the National Paralympic Powerlifting Championship in January 2026, which was inaugurated by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami through a virtual ceremony from COER University, Roorkee.
- ★ The event highlighted India's commitment to inclusive sports and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- ★ The championship is a prestigious national-level para-sports event focused on Paralympic powerlifting, a discipline that tests physical strength, mental resilience, discipline, and determination.
- ★ It provides competitive exposure to para-athletes and plays an important role in talent identification for future international events, including the Paralympic Games and World Championships.
- ★ The event promoted equal participation and confidence-building among persons with disabilities, helping to break social barriers and encourage positive attitudes towards disability. Such championships support the physical, mental, and social well-being of para-athletes and align with the broader vision of inclusive nation-building.
- ★ The championship aligns with national initiatives like Khelo India, reflecting India's growing success and focus on para-sports at both national and international levels.
- ★ Uttarakhand is steadily emerging as a sports hub, often referred to as "Khelbhoomi", having previously hosted major events such as the 38th National Games.
- ★ Hosting the National Paralympic Powerlifting Championship further reinforces the state's role in promoting inclusive, competitive, and national-level sports events.

Nat Sciver-Brunt Becomes First Centurion in Women's Premier League History

- ★ Nat Sciver-Brunt became the first batter to score a century in Women's Premier League history during WPL 2026.
- ★ She achieved the feat while playing for Mumbai Indians against Royal Challengers Bengaluru at Kotambi Stadium, Vadodara.
- ★ The historic knock came in Match 16 of WPL 2026, where she scored an unbeaten 100 off 57 balls.
- ★ She came in to bat early after Mumbai Indians lost their first wicket at just 16 runs and anchored the innings with composure.
- ★ Her innings included 16 fours and one six, blending consistency with controlled aggression.

- ★ The knock marked the first-ever three-digit individual score in WPL history after several near-misses in previous seasons.
- ★ A crucial highlight of the innings was the 131-run partnership for the second wicket with Hayley Matthews, who scored 56 off 39 balls.
- ★ The partnership stabilised the innings after the early setback and laid the foundation for a strong team total.
- ★ Their approach against both pace and spin reflected the growing tactical maturity and competitiveness of WPL 2026.
- ★ Prior to this match, no batter had scored a century in the Women's Premier League.
- ★ The previous highest individual scores were 99 not out by Georgi Voll and 99 by Sophie Devine.
- ★ Despite more than ten players crossing the 90-run mark in earlier seasons, the century had remained elusive.
- ★ Sciver-Brunt's innings finally ended the long wait and set a new benchmark for future editions of the Women's Premier League.

BOOKS & AUTHORS

Vice President Releases Book on Ram Janmabhoomi Issue

- ★ Vice President of India Shri C.P. Radhakrishnan released the book titled "Chalice of Ambrosia: Ram Janmabhoomi – Challenge and Response" at the Vice President's Enclave, New Delhi.
- ★ The book is authored by Shri Surendra Kumar Pachauri, a former Secretary to the Government of India.
- ★ The Vice President stated that the book presents the long and complex journey of reclaiming the birthplace of Lord Shri Ram in a balanced, factual, and scholarly manner, without exaggeration or bias.
- ★ He described the construction of Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya as a landmark moment in India's civilisational history, where faith, history, law, and democracy converged peacefully.
- ★ The Vice President credited Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for guiding the revival of the sacred site in a manner consistent with democratic values and cultural confidence.
- ★ The event was attended by dignitaries including Shri Nripendra Mishra, Shri Vinod Rai, Shri Deepak Gupta, Shri Amit Khare, and Shri Ashish Gosain of Har Anand Publications, among others.

Mr. Sumant Batra Launches Book titled "The Life and Legacy of Arun Jaitley"

- ★ A book titled The Life and Legacy of Arun Jaitley has been formally launched, chronicling the life, contributions, and legacy of late leader Arun Jaitley.
- ★ The book is authored by Sumant Batra and published by Om Books International.
- ★ Former Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu attended the event as the Chief Guest, underlining Jaitley's national stature.

- ★ The book portrays Arun Jaitley as an exceptional public figure who left a lasting imprint across law, politics, governance, and public service in India.

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Day of War Orphans 2026

- ★ World Day of War Orphans 2026 is observed annually on 6th January to highlight the hardships faced by children orphaned due to wars and conflicts.
- ★ The day draws attention to the physical neglect, mental trauma, emotional abuse, starvation, and disease suffered by millions of war-affected orphans worldwide.
- ★ Children who lose their parents in sudden and violent conflicts are often forced to live with relatives or within foster care systems, frequently under extremely poor living conditions.
- ★ Over the past few centuries, civilians have accounted for nearly half of war casualties, with this proportion steadily increasing until 2001, significantly impacting children.
- ★ According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) data (2015), there were nearly 140 million orphans worldwide.
- ★ Regional distribution of orphans includes 61 million in Asia, 52 million in Africa, 10 million in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 7.3 million in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
- ★ World Day for War Orphans was established by SOS Enfants en Détresse, a French charitable organization dedicated to restoring a sense of normalcy in the lives of children affected by war and conflict.
- ★ Every year on 6th January, awareness programmes and campaigns are conducted globally to help people understand the plight and suffering of war orphans and to promote support for their protection, care, and rehabilitation.

World Hindi Day 2026

- ★ World Hindi Day 2026 is observed on 10th January to promote the Hindi language globally.
- ★ Also known as Vishwa Hindi Divas, the day honors the Hindi language and its contributors.
- ★ The first World Hindi Conference (Vishva Hindi Sammelan) was held in 1975 in Nagpur, Maharashtra, marking the inception of World Hindi Day.
- ★ The Hindi Conference is conducted every three years to spread awareness about the language and its literary contributors.
- ★ Celebrations are held by public and private organizations in India, while Hindi-speaking communities abroad also observe the day with cultural and literary events.
- ★ The day emphasizes the promotion of Hindi literature, language awareness, and global recognition of Hindi as a medium of communication and culture.

Indian Army Day 2026

- ★ Indian Army Day 2026 is observed on 15th January 2026.
- ★ The day marks the 75th birth anniversary of Indian Army Day.
- ★ Indian Army Day is celebrated to commemorate the historic moment when Field Marshal K M Cariappa took over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from the British Commander-in-Chief.
- ★ The formal and final transfer of command took place on 15 January 1949, which is observed annually as Indian Army Day.
- ★ During World War I, around one million Indians volunteered to serve in the British Army, and nearly 90,000 Indian soldiers lost their lives in the war.
- ★ In World War II, approximately 50 percent of the officers involved in military engagements were Indians, highlighting their significant role.
- ★ As the Indian independence movement intensified in 1946, loyalty within the British-led Indian armed forces weakened.
- ★ A majority of the army and navy divisions either rebelled or resigned during this period.
- ★ Although the British military structure continued to be Indianised even after independence, the complete transfer of command was achieved on 15 January 1949, which is commemorated through Indian Army Day celebrations.

International Day of Education

- ★ International Day of Education 2026 is observed on 24 January worldwide.
- ★ The day was declared by the UN General Assembly in December 2018 to honour education and highlight its role in peace, development, and progress.
- ★ The day aims to advocate for universal access to quality education and to campaign for education reforms.
- ★ Millions of children around the world are still denied this basic human right, with UNESCO estimating 258 million children out of school.
- ★ Marginalized groups, people in unequal regions, and citizens of developing countries are the most affected.
- ★ International Day of Education calls on governments, civil society, institutions, and individuals to ensure primary and secondary education for all children.
- ★ The observance encourages the design of inclusive learning programs that cater to diverse populations, equipping children with the skills needed for employment and improved livelihoods.
- ★ The day reminds everyone that education is key to escaping poverty and building a better future, and that everyone has a role in promoting high-quality education.

National Girl Child Day

- ★ National Girl Child Day 2026 is observed on 24 January 2026 across India.

- ★ The day was established in 2008 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.
- ★ The main objective is to highlight discrimination, inequality, and injustice faced by girl children in society.
- ★ It aims to promote awareness about the rights of the girl child, including education, health, dignity, and equal opportunities.
- ★ Girl children in India often face gender-based discrimination, are denied higher education, and are pushed into household responsibilities at an early age.
- ★ The observance emphasizes the urgent need for equal treatment of female children and ensuring they receive opportunities they rightfully deserve.
- ★ On this day, the government organizes awareness programmes and campaigns to encourage positive societal attitudes towards the girl child.
- ★ National Girl Child Day supports broader goals of gender equality, women empowerment, and inclusive social development.

International Customs Day

- ★ International Customs Day 2026 is observed on 26th January every year.
- ★ The day was first initiated in 1983 by the World Customs Organization (WCO).
- ★ It is observed to honour customs officials and customs organisations who work continuously to ensure efficient management of global trade and cross-border commerce.
- ★ Customs officials play a crucial role in facilitating smooth cross-border trade transactions, ensuring security, compliance, and trade efficiency.
- ★ The observance also highlights the need to place people at the core of customs transformation processes, focusing on modernisation and service delivery.
- ★ The origins of the global customs framework date back to 1948, when the European Customs Union Study Group (ECUSG) was established by the Committee for European Economic Co-operation.
- ★ The ECUSG was formed to examine the feasibility of creating one or more inter-European customs unions.
- ★ To improve the effectiveness of customs administrations worldwide, the Customs Co-operation Council (CCC) was established in 1952.
- ★ The first session of the CCC was held on 26 January 1953, with 17 founding member countries participating.
- ★ In 1983, the CCC officially instituted International Customs Day to commemorate its first session.
- ★ With expansion beyond Europe and growing global membership, the Customs Co-operation Council was renamed the World Customs Organization (WCO) in 1994.
- ★ The headquarters of the World Customs Organization is located in Brussels, Belgium.

International Data Privacy Day

- ★ International Data Privacy Day is observed annually on 28 January to promote awareness about personal data protection and privacy in the digital age.
- ★ The day was initiated in 2006 by the Council of Europe to commemorate the signing of Convention 108, the world's first legally binding international treaty on data protection.
- ★ The Government of India has highlighted key reforms, including the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, and a ₹782 crore cybersecurity allocation in the Union Budget 2025–26.
- ★ India is currently the third-largest digitalised economy in the world, with over 101.7 crore broadband users.
- ★ Indian users spend nearly 1,000 minutes online daily, supported by some of the lowest data costs globally.
- ★ Major platforms such as Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface, MyGov, and eSanjeevani have transformed governance, payments, healthcare, and welfare delivery.
- ★ The Information Technology Act, 2000 provides the foundational legal framework for electronic governance, digital signatures, and cybersecurity oversight in India.
- ★ The Act empowers institutions such as the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, which functions as the national cyber incident response agency.

OBITUARY NEWS

Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia

- ★ Khaleda Zia, former Prime Minister of Bangladesh and chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), passed away at the age of 80 on December 30, 2025, after a prolonged illness.
- ★ She was a central figure in Bangladesh's politics for several decades and played a defining role in shaping the country's democratic and political landscape.
- ★ Khaleda Zia's long-standing political rivalry with Sheikh Hasina dominated Bangladesh's politics for many years and influenced multiple electoral cycles.
- ★ She was the first woman Prime Minister of Bangladesh, marking a historic milestone in the country's political history.
- ★ Khaleda Zia served two terms as Prime Minister, first coming to power in 1991 following the restoration of parliamentary democracy.
- ★ She returned to office for her second term from 2001, once again defeating her principal rival Sheikh Hasina.
- ★ During her political career, Khaleda Zia faced multiple corruption cases, which she described as politically motivated.
- ★ She was acquitted by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh in January 2025, ending long-running legal battles including the Zia Orphanage Trust case.

Renowned Ecologist and Conservationist Madhav D. Gadgil

- ★ Renowned ecologist, scholar, and conservationist Madhav Dhananjaya Gadgil passed away at the age of 83 in Pune, Maharashtra.
- ★ Madhav Gadgil, widely recognized as the father of modern Indian ecology, was a distinguished Indian ecologist, academic, author, and environmental conservationist.
- ★ He began his career as a scientist and ecological researcher in the 1960s and joined the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru.
- ★ He became a founding faculty member of the Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) at IISc, where he played a key role in designing ecology curricula, establishing long-term ecological field studies, and training students in scientific methods.
- ★ From 1981 to 2005, he served as Professor of Ecology at IISc, conducting research on forest ecosystems and biodiversity and contributing to environmental education and sustainable development.
- ★ In 2010, he was appointed Chairman of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), popularly known as the Gadgil Commission.
- ★ He served as a member of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT).
- ★ He played a pivotal role in establishing India's first Biosphere Reserve, the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, and in framing the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
- ★ He authored more than 250 scholarly papers on ecology and conservation, many of which were translated into multiple Indian languages.
- ★ He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1981 in the field of Civil Service and the Padma Bhushan in 2006 in the field of Science and Engineering.
- ★ In 2024, he was honoured with the United Nations (UN) Champion of the Earth Award.
- ★ His other major awards include the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement (2015), Harvard Centennial Medal (2002), and the Vikram Sarabhai Award (1990).

Veteran Journalist and Author Mark Tully

- ★ Veteran journalist, author, and broadcaster Mark Tully passed away in Delhi at the age of 90.
- ★ He was born in 1935 in Calcutta (Kolkata) during the British Raj and spent most of his life in India, earning the title "voice of India" by the BBC.
- ★ Tully joined the BBC in the 1960s and served as its New Delhi Bureau Chief for 22 years, covering South Asia.
- ★ He reported major events in India including the 1971 Bangladesh War, Emergency (1975–77), Operation Blue Star, assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, Bhopal Gas Tragedy, and Babri Masjid demolition.
- ★ Tully authored famous books such as No Full Stops in India, India in Slow Motion, and The Heart of India, and was fluent in Hindi, earning the nickname "Tully Sahib".
- ★ He was knighted by the UK in 2002 and received the Padma Shri (1992) and Padma Bhushan (2005) from the Government of India, making him a rare foreigner to receive both honours.

- ★ Tully also presented the BBC Radio 4 programme “Something Understood”, showcasing his contributions to broadcast journalism and literature.

