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NATIONAL NEWS

India to Chair International IDEA for the First Time

India will assume the chairship of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) for the first time during the Council of Member States meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, and will serve through 2026.

The role will be represented by Gyanesh Kumar, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India, reflecting global recognition of India's experience in conducting large-scale free, fair, and inclusive elections.

International IDEA, founded in 1995, is an intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden, focused on promoting and safeguarding sustainable democracy worldwide.

The organisation supports democratic systems through capacity building, electoral assistance, policy research, dialogue facilitation, and institutional strengthening, covering areas such as electoral processes, constitutional reforms, digital democracy, political finance, and democratic resilience amid climate change.

International IDEA currently consists of around 35 member countries, with the United States and Japan as observers. India is a founding member and has been an active contributor to governance, research, and training programmes.

India's chairship comes at a time when democracies globally face challenges, including misinformation, declining voter trust, technological disruptions, and threats to electoral integrity.

As Chair, India will play a key role in shaping global democratic discourse, promoting best practices in election management, and strengthening Election Management Bodies (EMBs) through training, knowledge sharing, and institutional support.

Bharat Taxi Begins Pilot Operations as India's Cooperative Ride-Hailing Platform

Bharat Taxi, operated by Sahakar Taxi Cooperative Limited, has started pilot operations in Delhi and Gujarat, offering an alternative to private cab aggregators with a driver-owned cooperative model.

The initiative is supported by the Union Ministry of Cooperation and the National e-Governance Division, under the government vision of "Sahakar Se Samriddhi."

Bharat Taxi follows a Zero-Commission Model, allowing drivers to retain 100% of their earnings, unlike commercial platforms that charge up to 30% commission.

The platform ensures No Surge Pricing, offering transparent and predictable fare rates for passengers.

Drivers, referred to as Saarthis, hold shareholding rights in the cooperative, enabling participation in decision-making and platform governance.

The system will integrate with DigiLocker, Unified Mobile Application for New-Age Governance (UMANG), and other government digital platforms to streamline operations.

The pilot phase began in November 2025, and within 10 days, over 51,000 drivers were onboarded, surpassing global cooperative platforms such as the New York-based Drivers Cooperative.

In Delhi alone, around 650 driver-owners have joined during the initial rollout, with a nationwide launch planned by December 2025.

The cooperative model aims to provide drivers with higher income security, dignity, and ownership, while offering passengers reliable service, fair pricing, and improved accountability.

Bharat Taxi aligns with national goals of inclusive digital growth, self-reliance, cooperative-driven development, and modern service delivery under the cooperative economy framework.

BANKING

Life Insurance Corporation of India Introduces New Insurance Plans

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), India's largest insurance company, launched two new insurance products: Protection Plus (Plan 886) and Bima Kavach (Plan 887) to enhance financial security and provide flexible savings or pure-risk cover options.

Protection Plus (Plan 886) is a Non-Participating, Linked, Life, Individual Savings Plan that combines life insurance protection with savings opportunities.

The entry age for Protection Plus is 18–65 years, with policy terms of 10, 15, 20, and 25 years, and premium paying terms (PPT) of 5, 7, 10, or 15 years.

Policyholders can choose the investment fund type, adjust the sum assured, make top-up premium payments, and partial withdrawals after five years.

Premiums are flexible, payable regularly or for a limited period, with minimum limits based on PPT and mode of payment and no maximum limit.

The maximum age at maturity can reach up to 90 years for a 25-year policy term, providing long-term savings and insurance coverage.

Bima Kavach (Plan 887) is a Non-Participating, Non-Linked, Life, Individual Pure Risk Plan offering financial protection to the family in case of the insured's unfortunate death during the policy term.

The entry age for Bima Kavach is 18–65 years, with applicants aged 60 years and above considered

case by case under underwriting and reinsurance approval.

The maturity age ranges from 28–100 years, and the policy term can extend up to 82 years with cover ceasing at 100 years.

Death benefits can be Level Sum Assured or Increasing Sum Assured, with the option to receive benefits in installments.

Premium payment options include single premium, limited premium (5, 10, or 15 years), or regular premium.

The minimum basic sum assured is Rs. 2 crore, with no upper limit subject to underwriting norms, and women and non-smokers receive special premium rates.

Life cover can be enhanced at predefined life-stage events, such as marriage or childbirth, under Level Sum Assured with regular premium.

NPCI International Partners with ACLEDA Bank

NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL), the international arm of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), partnered with ACLEDA Bank Plc, the first publicly listed commercial bank in Cambodia, to enable cross-border QR-based payments.

ACLEDA Bank, nominated by the National Bank of Cambodia as the operator of the Bakong (KHQR) national QR network, will help establish seamless QR-based payments between India and Cambodia.

Indian tourists can make payments at over 4.5 million KHQR merchant points in Cambodia using UPI apps, while Cambodian tourists can scan over 709 million UPI QRs in India using Cambodian apps.

The partnership enables the acceptance of Cambodia’s KHQR network in India and interoperability between UPI and KHQR, facilitating secure, frictionless cross-border payments.

The collaboration provides benefits for travellers, allowing payments across tourist attractions, restaurants, and retail outlets, enhancing convenience and financial inclusion in both countries.

India’s recent global payment linkages include the interlinking of UPI with TARGET Instant Payment Settlement (TIPS) operated by the Eurosystem, with collaboration between RBI, NIPL, and the European Central Bank.

UPI acceptance internationally is already enabled in Singapore, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, UAE, Mauritius, Qatar, and France, covering over two million international merchants.

NIPL is supporting countries such as Namibia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Peru to develop UPI-like payment systems.

Securities Exchange Board of India Launches SWAGAT-FI

The Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued the SEBI (Foreign Venture Capital Investors (FVCI)) (Amendment) Regulations, 2025 to allow low-risk foreign investors to participate in the Indian securities market through single window access.

SEBI introduced SWAGAT-FI (Single Window Automatic & Generalised Access for Trusted Foreign Investors) with objectives to provide easier investment access to verified low-risk foreign investors,

enable a unified registration process, and reduce repeated compliance and documentation.

The SWAGAT-FI framework applies to sovereign wealth funds, central banks, multilateral bodies, government-owned funds, regulated public retail funds, insurance companies, and pension funds.

Under SWAGAT-FI, entities can register simultaneously as Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) and FVCIs without additional documentation, enabling investment in listed equities and debt as FPIs and unlisted companies, specified sectors, and startups as FVCIs.

The amendments to the FPI and FVCI regulations will be effective from 01 June 2026.

SEBI has extended the registration continuance period, including fee payment and KYC review, to 10 years, up from the earlier 3–5 years, promoting long-term investor participation.

FPIs operating from International Financial Service Centres (IFSCs) can now include retail schemes with a resident Indian sponsor or manager, aligning them with Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).

SEBI addressed inconsistencies between SEBI and IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority) by capping sponsor contributions at 10% of a fund's corpus or assets under management.

DEFENCE

India–Malaysia Joint Military Exercise Harimau Shakti Begins

The 5th edition of India–Malaysia Joint Exercise Harimau Shakti–2025 began at Mahajan Field Firing Range, Rajasthan, and will be held from 05–18 December 2025.

The Indian contingent mainly comprises troops from the DOGRA Regiment, while Malaysia is represented by the 25th Battalion Royal Malaysian Army.

The exercise aims to rehearse Sub-Conventional Operations under Chapter VII of the United Nations Mandate with emphasis on counter-terrorist operations.

Both armies will practice cordon, search and destroy missions, heliborne operations, AMAR (Army Martial Arts Routine), combat reflex shooting, and Yoga.

Training includes securing helipads, conducting casualty evacuation, and improving interoperability during UN peacekeeping operations.

Both sides will exchange best practices, enhancing defence cooperation and strengthening bilateral relations between the Indian Army and the Royal Malaysian Army.

The 4th edition (2024) was held at Bentong Camp, Pahang District, Malaysia from 2–15 December 2024.

The 1st edition (2012) of Exercise Harimau Shakti took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in October 2012.

8th Edition of Indo–French Bilateral Air Exercise Garuda 25

The 8th edition of Exercise Garuda, a bilateral Indo–French air exercise, was held at Air Base 118, Mont-de-Marsan, France.

The exercise concluded on 27 November 2025, and the IAF contingent returned to India on 02 December 2025.

The exercise involved the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the French Air and Space Force (FASF).

The IAF participated with Su-30MKI fighter aircraft, supported by IL-78 air-to-air refuelling aircraft and C-17 Globemaster III transport aircraft.

Both air forces conducted complex air operations in a realistic operational environment, improving combat readiness.

Training included joint mission planning, coordinated strike and escort missions, and familiarisation with operational procedures, enhancing interoperability.

The IAF maintenance crew maintained high aircraft serviceability, ensuring smooth execution of all planned missions.

Exercise Garuda 2025 was one of the largest international air training engagements undertaken by the IAF in 2025.

India–Indonesia Joint Special Forces Exercise Garuda Shakti

The 10th edition of the India–Indonesia Joint Special Forces Exercise GARUDA SHAKTI commenced at the Special Forces Training School, Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh, and is being held from 03–12 December 2025.

The Indian contingent in the 2025 edition consists of troops from the PARACHUTE REGIMENT (Special Forces), while the Indonesian contingent comprises personnel from the Indonesian Special Forces.

The exercise aims to enhance mutual understanding, cooperation, and interoperability between the Special Forces of both countries.

Training involves troop-level tactics, counter-terrorism techniques, unarmed combat, combat shooting, sniping, heliborne operations, and planning for drone, counter-UAS, and loiter-munition strikes in semi-mountainous terrain.

Both sides are exchanging expertise on weapons, equipment, and operational practices to strengthen joint operational capabilities.

The exercise emphasises physical fitness, tactical drills, and high-intensity combat training, culminating in a validation exercise simulating real-world operational scenarios.

The 2025 edition of GARUDA SHAKTI marks a major step in enhancing India–Indonesia defence cooperation and strengthening bilateral military relations.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Stefan Priesner of Austria Named UN Resident Coordinator for India

United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed Stefan Priesner of Austria as the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator in India for a four-year term beginning 1 December 2025 and ending in 2029.

He succeeds Shombi Sharp, who completed a four-year term as UN Resident Coordinator in India.

Stefan Priesner began his career in the private sector and joined the UN in 1997, starting with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bhutan.

He served as Deputy Chief in Nepal (2001–2004) and Deputy Resident Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2004–2008).

He held senior roles including Country Director in Bangladesh (2008–2012), Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Uzbekistan (2013–2017), Resident Coordinator for Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore (2017–2021), and Resident Coordinator in Iran (2021–2025).

As UN Resident Coordinator in India, he oversees the UN Country Team, directs all UN development activities, represents the UN at the highest levels, provides policy guidance to the government, and drives progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

AU Small Finance Bank Appoints Ranbir Kapoor and Rashmika Mandanna as Brand Ambassadors

AU Small Finance Bank (AU SFB), which recently received the RBI's (Reserve Bank of India) in-principle approval to become a universal bank, has appointed Ranbir Kapoor and Rashmika Mandanna as brand ambassadors.

The bank aims to strengthen its identity as a preferred national banking brand across metros, urban centres, and deeper Bharat markets.

The collaboration focuses on boosting customer preference for AU SFB’s core products, particularly Savings Accounts and Current Accounts.

SPORTS

Archery Premier League Wins Emerging Professional Sports

Event of the Year

The Archery Premier League (APL) has won the title of Emerging Professional Sports Event of the Year at the India Sports Awards 2025 during FICCI TURF 2025, the 15th Global Sports Summit held in New Delhi.

The Archery Premier League is the world's first professional franchise-based archery league, launched by the Archery Association of India (AAI) to make archery more engaging, commercially viable, and broadcast-friendly.

The inaugural edition of the Archery Premier League was held from 2 October to 12 October 2025 at the Yamuna Sports Complex, New Delhi, featuring top national and international archers.

The main objective of the Archery Premier League is to elevate archery to modern professional sports standards, enhance fan engagement, strengthen India's global performance especially in the Olympic Games, and make the sport accessible to a wider audience.

The Archery Premier League featured six franchise teams, each composed of eight archers (four male and four female).

A total of 36 Indian archers and 12 international players participated.

The league included both recurve and compound archery, with teams selected through a draft format.

Matches followed a fast-paced format of 20 minutes, with 15 seconds per arrow, and were held under floodlights to increase broadcast appeal.

The league final saw the Rajputana Royals defeating the Prithviraaj Yodhas in a close 5–4 shoot-off, marking a dramatic finish to the first season.

The award strengthens the Archery Premier League's credibility, encourages higher sponsorship and media participation, and positions the league as a key force in advancing professional archery in India.