

1st & 2nd JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

MoD Signs Rs 2,867 Crore Contracts with MDL & Naval Group to bolster submarine capabilities

On December 30 2024, the Ministry of Defence (**MoD**) signed two contracts worth **Rs 2,867 crore** for the construction of "Air Independent Propulsion (**AIP**) Plug for Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)-AIP system and its integration onboard Indian Submarines", and "the integration of Electronic Heavy Weight Torpedo(**EHWT**) onboard the Kalvari-Class submarines".

- Both the contracts were signed in the presence of Defence Secretary, **Rajesh Kumar Singh** in New Delhi (Delhi).
- The aim is to enhance the endurance and firepower of India's naval assets through indigenous technologies, boosting both the operational capabilities and self-reliance in the defence sector.

About the MoUs:

i.AIP Plug Construction and Integration: A contract valued at **Rs 1,990 crore** was signed with Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited(MDL), Mumbai (Maharashtra) for constructing and integrating AIP Plug for the DRDO-AIP system.

- The AIP technology is being indigenously developed by DRDO and its Naval Materials Research Laboratory (NMRL),Thane, Maharashtra. The project pertaining to construction of AIP-plug and its integration will enhance the endurance of conventional submarines.
- The AIP Plug will allow submarines to stay submerged for longer durations by generating power without the need for atmospheric oxygen.

ii.Integration of EHWT: A contract worth **Rs 877 crore** was signed with Naval Group, France, for the integration of the EHWT onboard Kalvari-Class submarines.

- The EHWT is a large-caliber, self-propelled underwater weapon designed for engaging surface ships and submarines.
- The torpedo, developed by DRDO, is a cutting-edge weapon system that will significantly boost the offensive capabilities of these submarines, allowing them to better protect India's maritime borders.
- This collaborative effort between the Indian Navy(IN), DRDO, and Naval Group will significantly boost the firepower of these submarines.

iii.These projects will enhance the endurance of conventional submarines and contribute to the "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) initiative.

About Kalvari-Class submarines:

i.The Kalvari-class (Scorpene) diesel-electric attack submarines have been constructed at MDL with technology transfer from Naval Group.

ii.The boats are capable of various missions such as anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, long-range strikes, special operations, and intelligence.

About Naval Group:

Chief Executive Officer(**CEO**) – Pierre-Eric Pommellet

Headquarters – Paris, France

Founded – 1631

About Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL):

Chairman & Managing Director (**CMD**)– Sanjeev Singhal

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established- 1934

Kaamya Karthikeyan Becomes the Youngest Female in World to Scale Highest Peaks in all 7 Continents

Kaamya Karthikeyan, a 17-year old student from Navy Children School (NCS) in Mumbai (Maharashtra), scripted history by becoming the world's youngest female to scale the 7 highest peaks across seven continents.

- She achieved this remarkable significant milestone after she successfully climbed **Mount Vinson Massif** (4,892 metres, m) in Antarctica along with her father Commander S. Karthikeyan on December 24 2024.
- In 2021, she was conferred with the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Shakti Puraskar, India's highest national honour for young achievers.

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Kaamya Scaled World's Highest Peaks:

i. She 1st climbed **Mt. Kilimanjaro** (5,685 m), highest peak in Africa continent in 2017.

ii. Later, In 2018, she scaled **Mt. Kosciuszko** (2,228 m) in Australia continent, as well as **Mt. Elbrus** (5,642m) in Europe, in the same year.

iii. She climbed **Mt. Aconcagua** (6,962 m), highest peak in South America in 2020 followed by **Mt. Denali** (6,190 m) in North America in 2022.

iv. In May 2024, she scaled the summit of **Mt. Everest** (8,849 m) in Asia at the age of 16, becoming India's youngest climber and the world's 2nd youngest girl to summit the world's highest peak and Asia's highest peak from Nepal side.

About the Seven Peaks of the Seven Continents :

1. Mount Vinson Massif:

- The 4892 m mountain is a large mountain massif in Antarctica and is located about 1,200 kilometres(km) from the South Pole, one of the coldest places on Earth.
- It is situated in the Sentinel Range of the Ellsworth Mountains of western Antarctica.
- It was named after Carl Vinson, a United States(US) Representative from Georgia who served in Congress from 1935 to 1961.

2. Mount Kilimanjaro:

- Mount Kilimanjaro is located in Tanzania. It is the African continent's highest peak at 5,895 m.
- It is the largest free-standing mountain in the world. It is made up of three cones: Kibo, Mawenzi and Shira.

3. Mount Kosciuszko:

- Mount Kosciuszko is the tallest mountain peak in mainland Australia at 2,228 m. It is located in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales.
- It was named in honour of Tadeusz Kościuszko, a Polish patriot and statesman by the Polish explorer Paul Strzelecki in 1840.

4. Mount Elbrus:

- Mount Elbrus is the highest peak of the Caucasus mountains, southwestern Russia.
- It is an extinct volcano with twin cones reaching 18,510 feet (5,642 m) and 18,356 feet (5,595 m).

5. Mount Aconcagua:

- At 6961 m, Aconcagua is the highest mountain in the Americas. It lies in the Southern Andes Mountains of the South American continent.
- It is the highest mountain in the world outside Asia.

6. Mount Denali :

- It is the highest **mountain** peak in North America, located in Alaska, the United States of America(USA).
- It is a block of granite with a height of 6,190 m.
- The name of the peak was changed from "Mount McKinley" to "Denali."

7. Mount Everest:

- It is the world's highest mountain peak situated in the **Greater Himalayas** along the boundary of Nepal and Tibet.
- The height of the peak is 8,849m.
- The peak was named Mount Everest in 1865 in honour of Sir George Everest who was the head of the Survey of India when its height was accurately measured.

TN CM Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin unveils India's 1st glass bridge at Kanniyakumari

On December 30, 2024, the Chief Minister (CM) of Tamil Nadu (TN), **Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin**, inaugurated **India's 1st** bowstring arch glass bridge which connects the 133-foot Thiruvalluvar Statue and the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in **Kanniyakumari, TN**.

- The bridge was inaugurated as part of the **Silver Jubilee** (25th year) celebration of the Thiruvalluvar Statue's installation.
- He further declared that the Thiruvalluvar Statue will now be referred to as the '**Statue of Wisdom**'.

About India's 1st bowstring arch glass bridge:

i. Measuring **77 meters** in length and **10 meters** in width, the bridge has been constructed using advanced technology to withstand corrosion and the force of strong sea winds.

ii. Built by the TN government at a cost of **Rs. 37 crore**, the bridge aims to save tourists' time by eliminating the need for a ferry ride between the two monuments.

- Currently, the Poompuhar Shipping Corporation operates a ferry service from the Kanyakumari boat jetty to the Vivekananda Memorial, and then to the Thiruvalluvar Statue.

iii. The glass bridge is expected to become a major new attraction in Kanyakumari, which draws thousands of visitors daily to witness its famous sunrise and sunset.

About the Thiruvalluvar Statue:

i. Saint-poet Thiruvalluvar, believed to have lived 2,000 years ago, authored 1,330 couplets known as the Thirukkural.

ii. The 133-foot-tall, 7,000-tonne weight statue, located on a rock in the sea off the Kanyakumari coast, was unveiled by former TN CM M. Karunanidhi on January 1, 2000.

- It was designed by the renowned sculptor **V. Ganapati Sthapati**.
- The 133-foot height of the statue represents the 133 chapters of the Thirukkural.

About Tamil Nadu(TN) :

Chief Minister (CM) – Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin

Governor – Ravindra Narayana Ravi

Folk Dance – Bharatanatyam, Karagattam, Bommalattam, Kavadi Attam, Oyilattam

NeGD Signs MoU with IPA to Boost Digital Transformation in India's Maritime Sector

On December 24, 2024, the New Delhi (Delhi)-based National e-Governance Division (**NeGD**), operating under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY), signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with the Indian Ports Association (**IPA**), also headquartered in New Delhi, to drive **digital adoption** in India's maritime sector.

- The agreement was finalized by **Nand Kumarum**, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the NeGD, and **Vikas Narwal**, Managing Director (MD) of IPA.

i.The collaboration aims to modernize India's ports by merging NeGD's tech expertise with IPA's maritime insights, using real-time data, advanced analytics, and system integration to address outdated systems and enhance efficiency and competitiveness.

ii.**NeGD** was established in 2009 under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) and operates as an independent business unit of the Digital India Corporation (DIC).

iii.**IPA** was founded in 1966 under the Societies Registration Act 1860, operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (**MoPSW**).

DPIIT Signs MoU with boAt to Support Startups in Manufacturing and D2C Sectors

In December 2024, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (**DPIIT**), Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with **boAt**, a prominent Indian audio and wearables brand, to support startups.

- The partnership aims to nurture DPIIT-recognized startups, particularly in the Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) and manufacturing sectors.

i.**Key features** of the collaboration include:curate dedicated programs, initiatives for mentoring startups, innovators and entrepreneurs, provide resources, guidance and support for different milestones such as prototype development and offer connections and insights for international expansion, wherever applicable and feasible.

ii.This initiative underscores the commitment to the '**Make in India**' initiative and strengthens the startup ecosystem.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

18th Edition of India-Nepal Military Exercise 'Surya Kiran' commences in Nepal

The **18th edition** of the Battalion Level Joint Military Exercise '**Surya Kiran**' commences in Saljhandi, Nepal. The exercise was scheduled to take place from 31st December 2024 to 13th January 2025.

- The exercise aims to strengthen India-Nepal defence cooperation and enhance the professional skills of the IA and NA personnel.

Note: The **17th** Edition of 'Surya Kiran', was conducted in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, India from 24th November to 7th December 2023.

Key Points:

- i. The annual bilateral military exercise is alternatively hosted by the Indian Army(IA) and the Nepali Army.(NA).
- ii. The exercise focuses on joint operations, particularly in jungle warfare and counter-terrorism operations on mountains and also emphasises Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief(HADR), in alignment with the United Nations Charter(UNC).
- iii. The exercise follows successful visits by General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) of IA to Nepal, and the visit by General Ashok Raj Sigdel, COAS of NA to India.

Participants:

i. The IA contingent is being led by a Battalion from the **11th Gorkha Rifles**.

- A contingent of **334 personnel** from the 11th Gorkha Rifles Regiment of the IA will represent **India**.
- The 11th Gorkha Rifles holds historical significance as the **1st regiment** raised post-independence in 1947.

ii. The NA contingent represented by the **Srijung Battalion**.

India-Nepal Defence Relations:

i. India and Nepal share a deep defence relationship, with **Nepali Gorkhas** serving in the IA.
ii. The prominent traditions between the two countries was the mutual conferment of the **Honorary General rank.**

- **General Upendra Dwivedi**, COAS of IA, was awarded the Honorary General rank of the NA by the President of Nepal **Ramchandra Paudel** in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Similarly, the President of India, **Droupadi Murmu** conferred the Honorary General rank of the IA for **General Ashok Raj Sigdel**, COAS of the NA in New Delhi (Delhi), India.

About Nepal:

Prime Minister(**PM**)– KP Sharma Oli

President- Ram Chandra Poudel

Capital- Kathmandu

Currency- Nepalese Rupee(NPR)

BANKING & FINANCE

YES Bank & FICCI FLO Launched 'YES PowerUp' to Promote Women Entrepreneurs

In December 2024, **YES Bank Limited**, India's 6th largest private sector bank in partnership with Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry(FICCI) Ladies Organisation (**FLO**), largest women's chamber of commerce in South Asia region, announced the launch of '**YES PowerUp**', a specialized Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises(MSME) programme designed to empower women entrepreneur in promoting their businesses.

- It offers comprehensive financial solutions customized to cater the unique requirements of women-led enterprises.
- The programme features specialized Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) loans, premium business accounts, international trade and forex services, investment opportunities, credit card options, and insurance plans.

Key Features:

i.SME Loans: It will offer comprehensive funding solutions like: waiving of 50% processing fee for members of FICCI FLO.

ii.YES First Business Account: It will provide premium transactional accounts with exclusive benefits for women entrepreneurs.

iii.Trade & Forex Solutions: Eligible women entrepreneurs will get access to international markets with various trade and forex solutions.

iv.Investment Solutions: Beneficiaries will be able to trade maximum **Rs 1.5 crore** at zero brokerage for 60 days with YES securities.

v.Card Solutions: Under this programme, business credit cards for domestic and international level will be issued, featuring low foreign currency markups.

vi.Insurance Plans: It will provide offerings designed specifically for asset protection, cancer coverage, and discounted term plans.

About Yes Bank Limited:

Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Prashant Kumar

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Tagline-Experience our expertise

Established- 2004

About FICCI Ladies Organisation (FICCI FLO):

President- Joyshree Das Verma

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 1983

RBI penalizes Rs 5.50 lakh on 4 cooperative banks from Karnataka for Regulatory Non-Compliance

In December 2024, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) imposed a penalty of **Rs 5.50** lakh on **4 Cooperative Banks(CBs)** from Karnataka for non-compliance with regulatory guidelines.

- The banks include Bengaluru(Karnataka) based Bharat Cooperative Bank Limited, Swami Vivekanand Sahakari Bank Niyamit, Sri Basaveshwara Pattana Sahakara Bank Niyamit and Manjra Mahila Urban Cooperative Bank Limited.

i.Bharat Cooperative Bank(BCB) Limited was fined **Rs 3 lakh** for approving new loans and advances that exceeded prescribed limits and lacked proper collateral, violating the Supervisory Action Framework (SAF) guidelines.

ii.Swami Vivekanand Sahakari Bank Niyamit was penalized **Rs 1 lakh** for failing to adhere to exposure norms for Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) and Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. The bank also did not meet prudential limits for inter-bank exposure and failed to upload KYC records to the Central KYC Records Registry (CKYCR) on time.

iii.Sri Basaveshwara Pattana Sahakara Bank Niyamit was fined **Rs 1 lakh** for increasing its exposure to high Non-Performing Asset(NPA) sectors without prior RBI approval and declaring dividends without RBI's consent.

iv.Manjra Mahila Urban Cooperative Bank Limited was penalized **Rs 50,000** for not uploading customers' KYC records to CKYCR within the required timeline.

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, RGA Launched 'ICICI Pru Wish' Insurance Product for Women

In December 2024, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited** in partnership with Reinsurance Group of America, Incorporated (**RGA**) launched '**ICICI Pru Wish,**' a health insurance product designed to cover critical illnesses and surgeries specific to women.

- It provides an immediate payout of up to 100% of the health coverage amount upon the diagnosis of critical illnesses, including breast, cervical, and uterine cancers, as well as heart conditions.

i.With a 30-year premium guarantee, the product helps customers plan their premium payments more effectively and offers a 12-month premium break at any time during the payment term, providing financial flexibility to manage health-related expenses.

ii.Unlike standard plans that pay out

through reimbursements, the product provides a fixed lump sum upon diagnosis, offering flexibility to customers.

iii.The plan covers ailments like breast, cervical, and uterine cancers, as well as heart conditions.

RBI Allows UPI Payments Through Full-KYC PPIs

In December 2024, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced a new provision that enables Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payments **from/to Full-KYC** (Know Your Customer) Prepaid Payment Instruments(PPIs) through third-party UPI applications(apps).

- This move comes in line with the RBI's Statement on Development and Regulatory Policies announced on **April 5, 2024**.
- Previously, UPI payments for PPIs could only be made through the PPI issuer's mobile apps.

i.Under this updated provision, PPI issuers will be able to allow holders of their Full-KYC PPIs to link these PPIs to their UPI handle and make payments or receive funds via **third-party UPI apps**.

ii.The transactions will be pre-approved before being processed in the UPI system, ensuring security and the authentication for these transactions will be carried out using the PPI's existing credentials.

Note: PPI is a financial tool that allows users to store funds on a card or digital wallet for future transactions.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Swiggy Partners with NSE to Empower Delivery Partners with Financial Literacy

On December 24, 2024, **Swiggy Limited**, Swiggy Limited, an Indian online food delivery and e-commerce platform, headquartered in Bengaluru, Karnataka, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with the Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based National Stock Exchange of India Limited (**NSE**). The partnership aims to introduce a financial literacy program designed specifically for Swiggy's delivery partners, with a strong focus on empowering women in the workforce.

- The Chief Guest for the event was **Amruta Fadnavis**, Vice-President of Axis Bank Limited and the wife of Chief Minister (CM) of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis.

i.Swiggy Limited **aims** to have **1 lakh** women delivery partners by **2030**, offering them financial training led by trainers certified by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

ii.The program is part of Swiggy's comprehensive initiatives, such as "**She the Change**" and "Swiggy Skills", to empower its workforce and promote financial inclusion.

iii.Swiggy founded in 2014 and the current Managing Director(MD)and Group Chief Executive Officer(CEO).

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Rajat Verma Appointed as CEO of DBS Bank India

In December 2024, **Rajat Verma** was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer(**CEO**) of the DBS Bank India Limited (**DBIL**), a subsidiary of the Singapore-based DBS Group, effective from 1st March 2025. He will also become a member of DBS's Group Management Committee.

- He will succeed **Surojit Shome**, who is set to retire on February 28 2025 after successfully leading the bank for 10 years.
- Currently, he serves as the head of Institutional Banking Group (IBG) at DBIL..
- The Reserve Bank of India(RBI) has approved Rajat Verma's appointment following DBS Bank's proposal.

About Rajat Verma:

i.He is an experienced banker with 27 years of expertise in areas like consumer and corporate banking, transaction banking, financial institutions, sustainable finance, SME banking, and branch banking.

ii.He joined DBIL in June 2023. Under his leadership, DBIL was also recognized as the Best Bank for Sustainable Finance – India by Global Finance in 2024.

iii.Before joining DBIL, Verma was the Managing Director (MD) and Country Head of Commercial Banking at Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (HSBC) India.

About DBS Bank India Limited(DBIL):

In 2019, DBS Bank announced the launch of DBIL, which was the first large foreign bank in India to operate as a wholly-owned subsidiary of a global bank. DBIL has expanded to over 350 locations across 19 states in India.

Chief Executive Officer(**CEO**) – Rajat Verma

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Cherukumalli Srinivasa Rao Appointed as Director of IARI

In December 2024, an agricultural scientist from Andhra Pradesh (AP) , **Cherukumalli Srinivas Rao** was appointed as the Director of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (**IARI**), New Delhi, Delhi.

- He succeeded Dr. A.K. Singh, who retired in June 2024.
- He currently serves as the director of the National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (**NAARM**), Hyderabad, Telangana.

i. Srinivas Rao completed his postdoctoral research at Tel Aviv University in Israel. He has held leadership roles in several research institutions across India.

ii. He was appointed member of the ICAR governing body in 2023 for a three-year term. He has also served as central advisory member of the Rashtriya Gokul Mission.

About Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI):

The Agricultural Research Institute (ARI) also called Pusa Institute, was founded in 1905 in Pusa, Bihar. In 1911, its name was changed to the Imperial Institute of Agricultural Research. It was then renamed as the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute in 1919. After the Independence of India, it was renamed as the IARI.

- It was relocated to New Delhi, Delhi in 1936. It is administered by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Chairman – Ashok Kumar Singh

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

RBL Bank Sells Entire Stake in DAM Capital Advisors

Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **RBL Bank Limited** has **sold** its **entire 8.16% stake** in **DAM Capital Advisors Limited**, also based in Mumbai. As a result of this transaction, RBL Bank Limited no longer holds any shares in DAM Capital Advisors Limited.

i.The sale, involving 57.71 Lakh equity shares with a face value (FV) of Rs. 2 each, was conducted through an **offer for sale** (OFS) following DAM Capital's initial public offering (IPO), which took place from December 19 to 23, 2024.

ii.The shares were sold at Rs. 283 each, with the total **transaction value** amounting to **Rs. 163.32 crore**. Before the IPO, the bank had already sold 10.60 lakh shares, or 1.5%, of DAM Capital Advisors Limited through a secondary market transaction.

- DAM Capital Advisors Limited (DAM Capital), an investment bank in India, established in 1993, made its stock market debut on December 27, 2024.
- RBL Bank, formerly known as Ratnakar Bank Limited, is an Indian private sector bank founded in 1943 and R Subramaniakumar is Managing Director (MD) & CEO of the Bank since June 23, 2022.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

ISRO launches PSLV-C60 SpaDeX Mission with two spacecraft SDX01 & SDX02

On December 30, 2024, the Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**) successfully launched the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (**PSLV**)-C60 rocket from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh (AP). This historic mission, named as the Space Docking Experiment (**SpaDeX**), involves a pioneering attempt to dock **two** small spacecraft SDX01 & SDX02 in space.

- The mission aims to successfully demonstrate the ability to bring the two spacecraft together, dock them, transfer power between them, and then undock them.
- The PSLV-C60 mission was ISRO's **99th launch** and will undergo various operations leading up to the final docking by **January 7, 2025**.
- PSLV rocket becomes the **1st vehicle** to be integrated up to the **4th stage** at the PSLV Integration Facility (PIF) established at the SDSC.
- The success of this mission will make India the **4th** country in the world with space docking technology after Russia (the former USSR), the United States of America (USA) and China.

About the mission:

i. The 44.5 metre (m) tall PSLV-C60 rocket carries the SpaDeX spacecraft into a 475 kilometer (km) Low Earth Circular Orbit (LEO at 55° inclination) with two spacecraft weighing 220 kilogram (kg) each as its primary payloads.

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Primary Objective:

i. The mission was designed to demonstrate rendezvous, docking, and undocking technology with two small spacecraft: Spacecraft A- **SDX01** (the Chaser) and Spacecraft B-**SDX02** (the Target).

- Rendezvous in space is the process of bringing 2 spacecraft together. The docking refers to the meeting of both the spacecraft and physical joining.

ii.In addition to the docking technology, the SpaDeX spacecraft are equipped with a differential GNSS-based Satellite Positioning System (SPS) to provide Position, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) solutions for both spacecraft, ensuring precise control and coordination during their orbital movement.

- The 10,000 square meter (sq m) facility was equipped to manufacture electronic subsystems and integrate up to 4 large satellites simultaneously.

iii.Spacecraft Docking: The two spacecraft will perform a controlled rendezvous, meeting each other in space.The Chaser (SDX01) will approach the Target (SDX02) in steps, reducing the distance between them from 20 km (known as Far Rendezvous) to 3 meters before docking in a precision-controlled maneuver by the ISRO's ISTRAC (ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network), Bengaluru.

v.After the successful docking, ISRO will conduct an electrical power transfer between the two satellites.

- The Chaser will approach the Target with progressively reduced inter-satellite distances of 5 km, 1.5 km, 500 m, 225 m, 15 m, and 3 m, ultimately leading to the docking of the two spacecraft.

vi.Further, both the Chaser and the Target satellites will undock and separate to start the operation of their respective payloads for the expected mission life of up to 2 years.

Secondary Objectives:

- Demonstrating the transfer of electric power between the docked spacecraft, which is crucial for future in-space applications like robotics.
- Composite spacecraft control to manage and coordinate multiple spacecraft in orbit.
- Payload operations post-undocking, testing the functionality and performance of the payloads after separation.

Key Points:

i.The PSLV-C60 SpaDeX mission is the 4th of the rocket (PS-4) of the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-4 (POEM-4).

- It carried a total of 24 payloads with 14 from ISRO centers and 10 from non-government entities (academia & start-ups), through Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe).

iii.This mission sets the stage for India's future space endeavors, including satellite servicing, interplanetary missions, and the development of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (**BAS**).

iv.The Assembly, Integration and Testing (AIT) of the satellites were conducted at ATL's new state-of-the-art facility in the KIADB Aerospace Park, Bengaluru.

It also features docking strategy supported by an inter-satellite communication link (ISL), enabling real-time communication and state monitoring between the spacecraft.

v.The mission also employs a GNSS-based Relative Orbit Determination and Propagation (RODP) processor to accurately determine position and velocity.

About Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX):

i.The SpaDeX mission, ISRO's year-end project is a pivotal project designed to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for the docking of small spacecraft in space.

- It was designed by the UR Rao Satellite Centre (URSC) with the support of other ISRO centers.

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO):

ISRO is one of the **six** largest space agencies in the world.

Chairman- Dr. Sreedhara Panicker Somanath

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

Establishment- August 15, 1969

China Unveils World's Fastest High-Speed Train 'CR450'

In December 2024, **China** introduced its next-generation world's high-speed train, **the CR450**, setting a new record with a top test speed of **450 kilometer/hour**(km/h), surpassing the previous High Speed Rail (HSR) CR400 Fuxing, which reached 350 km/h.

- It was developed by China Railway Group Limited (**CREC**), the CR450 prototype underwent tests in China, showcasing advanced technology and engineering.
- The project ,initiated in 2021, aims to enhance safety, energy efficiency, and passenger comfort.

i.Key features of the CR450 include streamlined design that reduces energy consumption by **20%**.The prototypes, designated CR450AF and CR450BF, utilize advanced technologies such as water-cooled, permanent magnet traction systems, and high-stability bogie systems.

ii.The CR450 provides a superior travel experience with increased cabin space, noise reduction and adjustable storage for bikes and wheelchairs.

SPORTS

Haryana Steelers won the first ever 'PKL Title' with 32-23 Over Patna Pirates

On December 29, 2024, **Haryana Steelers** (professional kabaddi team based in Haryana) triumphed over **Patna Pirates** (professional kabaddi team based in Bihar) with a **32-23** victory in the final of **Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) Season 11** held at the Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Balewadi, Pune, Maharashtra.

- This win marked the first-ever PKL title for the Haryana Steelers.
- The Haryana Steelers were awarded a prize of **Rs 3 crore** for winning the title, while the Patna Pirates received Rs 1.8 crore as runners-up.

i.The team is led by Jaideep Dahiya & Rahul Sethpal and was coached by Manpreet Singh. It is owned by JSW (Jindal South West) Sports, of the JSW Group.

ii.The Iranian player of Haryana Steelers, Mohammadreza Shadlouei was awarded the "Most Valuable Player of Season 11" & "Best Defender of Season 11" and the coach of Haryana Steelers Manpreet Singh was named as the "Super Coach of Season 11".

On December 29, 2024, **Haryana Steelers** (professional kabaddi team based in Haryana) triumphed over **Patna Pirates** (professional kabaddi team based in Bihar) with a **32-23** victory in the final of **Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) Season 11** held at the Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex in Balewadi, Pune, Maharashtra.

- This win marked the **first-ever PKL** title for the Haryana Steelers.
- The Iranian player of Haryana Steelers, **Mohammadreza Shadlouei** was awarded the "Most Valuable Player of Season 11" & "Best Defender of Season 11" and the coach of Haryana Steelers **Manpreet Singh** was named as the "Super Coach of Season 11".

Prize Money:

- The Haryana Steelers were awarded a prize of **Rs 3 crore** for winning the title, while the Patna Pirates received **Rs 1.8 crore** as runners-up.

About Haryana Steelers:

The team is led by **Jaideep Dahiya & Rahul Sethpal** and was coached by Manpreet Singh. It is owned by JSW (Jindal South West) Sports, of the JSW Group.

Key Points:

i.The Haryana Steelers topped the league stage of PKL Season 11 maintained control through a solid defensive effort led by Jaideep and Rahul Sethpal, making it difficult for Patna Pirates' raiders, including Devank Dalal and Ankit, to score.

ii.As the match neared its end at the second half, Mohammad Reza Shadloui led his team to a 9-point advantage, completing an All Out, sealing the victory by securing 32-23 scoreline .

- For the Haryana Steelers, the champions, Shivam Patare scored **9 points**, leading the offensive charge, Mohammadreza Shadloui bagged **7 points** and was pivotal in both attack and defence and **Vinay** added **6 more** to the cause.

iii.The victory also marked the Haryana Steelers' dominance in the league, having finished at the top of the table with 16 wins from 22 matches and 84 points during the regular season.

PKL 2024 Awards Season 11:

Category	Name
Raid of Season 11	Manjeet (Telugu Titans)
Tackle of Season 11	Ankit (Patna Pirates)
Best Raider of Season 11	Devank Dalal (Patna Pirates)
Best Defender of Season 11	Mohammadreza Shadloui (Haryana Steelers)
New Young Player of Season 11	Ayan Lohchab (Patna Pirates)
Most Valuable Player of Season 11	Mohammadreza Shadloui (Haryana Steelers)
Super Coach of Season 11	Manpreet Singh (Haryana Steelers)

Denmark's Anders Antonsen won the Inaugural King Cup International Badminton Open 2024

Denmark badminton player **Anders Antonsen** (World no. 2) claimed the inaugural King Cup International Badminton Open 2024 title after defeating China's **Hu Zhe'an** in a 2-1 victory (21-18, 11-21, 18-21) in the final match held in Shenzhen, the People's Republic of China.

- Anders Antonsen won the monetary prize of 1.1 million Renminbi (RMB) and the Hu Zhe'an, 1s the runner-up of the tournament received 5,00,000 RMB.
- While, India's ace badminton player ranked at world no. 12, **Lakshya Sen** secured 3rd position at the tournament by defeating Alex Lanier (France), and received the monetary prize of around 36 lakhs.

King Cup International Badminton Open 2024:

i. It is a unique badminton tournament started by two-time Olympic champion Lin Dan (China).

ii. It featured only men's singles event and witnessed the participation of 8 players.

iii. The tournament is officially registered on the Badminton World Federation (BWF) but is categorised as non-world ranking event, means it does not offer ranking points.

About Anders Antonsen:

i. He is a 3-time world championships medallist: silver (2019 and 2021) and Bronze (2023).

About Lakshya Sen:

i. Lakshya Sen, former World Junior No.1 badminton player, has won a gold medal in 2022 Commonwealth Games (**CWG**) in Birmingham, the United Kingdom (UK) and in 2018 Asia Junior Championships in Jakarta, Indonesia.

ii. He reached in the men's singles semi-finals at Paris 2024 Olympics thus, became the 1st Indian ever to reach the semi-finals at Summer Olympic Games.

World Boxing forms new Asian body: India Takes Centre Stage with Ajay Singh as Board Member

In December 2024, **World Boxing** (formerly known as Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur, AIBA) added **Asia** as the newest member of its global structure. A new Asian Confederation was formed to enhance the development, representation and promotion of boxing throughout Asia.

- The development came after Asian Boxing Confederation (ASBC) members voted in favour of remaining part of the International Boxing Association (IBA) during the Congress held in Bangkok, Thailand.
- India has emerged as a key player in this strategic expansion, reflecting its growing prominence in international boxing.

Key Appointments and Their Roles:

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) has been granted seven pivotal positions in the new interim Asian Boxing body, with **Ajay Singh**, President of the BFI, appointed as a board member.

i. Hemanta Kumar Kalita, Secretary General of BFI, has been included in the Olympic Commission.

ii. The BFI Treasurer, **Digvijay Singh**, will be a part of the Finance and Audit Committee, ensuring fiscal oversight and accountability within the organization.

iii. Other key figures from India will hold important roles:

- **Narender Kumar Nirwan**, Vice President (VP) (North Zone) of BFI, will serve on the Constitution Commission.
- **DP Bhatt**, Chairman of the BFI Disciplinary & Disputes Commission, will join the Sports and Competition Commission.
- **Dr. Karanjeet Singh** will represent India on the newly formed Medical Commission.

iv. Lovlina Borgohain, a Tokyo 2020 Olympic medalist, has been appointed to the Athlete Commission of the new Asian body.

- As one of the three members, she will advocate for improved training facilities, equitable opportunities, and strong support systems across Asia to help boxers excel internationally.
- She won a bronze medal in boxing at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and also earned a gold medal at the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

vi. The creation of the Asian Boxing body marks a significant milestone for World Boxing, as it seeks to secure the sport's place in the **Los Angeles 2028** Olympics and beyond.

Upcoming Events :

i.India is set to host major boxing events, including the **World Boxing Cup Final 2025** and the **World Boxing Congress 2025** in New Delhi (Delhi).

ii.These events are scheduled for **November 2025**, positioning India as a central hub for global boxing development and growing prominence in the sport.

About World Boxing:

President – Boris van der Vorst

Headquarters – Renens, Switzerland

Founded – 2023

OBITUARY

Former Time Warner's CEO Richard Parsons passed away

In December 2024, **Richard Parsons**, an American black businessman, former chairman of Citigroup and former Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) of Time Warner Inc. passed away at the age of 76 in New York, the United States of America (**USA**). He was born on **April 4 1948** in New York, USA.

About Richard Parsons:

i.Richard Parsons began his career as a lawyer for former New York governor **Nelson Rockefeller**.

- In 1995 , he joined Time Warner Inc. as **President** after serving as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer(CEO) of Dime Bancorp Inc. He ascended to CEO position in 2002.

ii.He stepped down as the **CEO of Time Warner Inc.** in 2007 and the Chairman in 2008 in the evolution of the media conglomerate.

iv.From 2009 to 2012, he served as **Chairman of Citigroup Inc.** Under his leadership, the company returned to profitability and restored stability.

- In 2018, he served as the 'Interim Chairman' of the Board at Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS).
- He also served as an Economic Adviser on President Barack Obama's transition team.

v.He also served on the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture boards, the Museum of Modern Art, and the American Museum of Natural History.

3rd JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Mission MAUSAM: Enhancing Weather and Climate Resilience for India

Mission MAUSAM, a landmark initiative led by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), is designed to position India as a world leader in the field of weather and climate sciences. It aimed to make India "Weather Ready" and "Climate Smart", complying with the international standards by **2026**.

- It was approved by the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi in September 2024, with a total budget outlay of **Rs 2,000 crore** for period of 2 years.

i. It is a transformative initiative which aims to boost India's capacity in weather and climate-related sciences and services.

- **Key Target:** To setup 50 Doppler Weather Radars (DWR), 60 Radio Sonde /Radio Wind (RS/RW) stations, 100 disdrometers, 10 Wind Profilers, 25 radiometers, 1 urban test-bed, 1 process test-bed, 1 ocean research station and 10 marine automatic weather stations with upper air observation.

ii. The mission is being implemented by MoES through its 3 premier institutions: New Delhi (Delhi)-based India Meteorological Department (**IMD**), Noida (Uttar Pradesh, UP) based National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (**NCMRWF**), and Pune (Maharashtra)-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (**IITM**).

- The mission further received support from allied bodies of MoES like: Hyderabad (Telangana)-based Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and Chennai (Tamil Nadu, TN)-based National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT).

About Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES):

Union Minister of State (**MoS**) (Independent Charge, IC)– Dr. Jitendra Singh (Constituency-Udhampur, Jammu & Kashmir, J&K)

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- It aims to revolutionize India's weather and climate services, ensuring timely and precise observation modeling, and forecasting information for various sectors like: agriculture, disaster management and rural development.

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- The IMD will mainly focus on observations, services, decision support systems, and dissemination. The IITM will focus on specialized field campaigns, research testbeds, process studies, and modeling. The NCMRWF will focus on data assimilation and seamless weather prediction.
- The mission further received support from allied bodies of MoES like: Hyderabad (Telangana)-based Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and Chennai (Tamil Nadu, TN)-based National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT).

iii.The mission is based on '**multi-pronged approach**' which will help in achieving its key objectives that include:

- **Infrastructure Development:** It includes the installation of Doppler Weather Radars (DWRs), Automatic Weather Stations (AWS), and rain gauges across India.
- **Supercomputing Power:** It involves the use of high-performance computing systems like: Pratyush and Mihir for advanced climate modelling.
- **Collaborative Research:** The mission fosters partnerships with international organisations like: World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) to improve forecasting techniques.
- **Public Outreach:** It includes dissemination of user-friendly advisories through mobile applications (apps) for example: Mausam app; Short Message Service(SMS) services and media channels.

Key Objectives:

The mission has outlined some of its key objectives that include:

- i.**To develop cutting edge weather surveillance technologies & Systems;
- ii.**To implement higher resolution atmospheric observations with better temporal and spatial sampling or coverage for improved accuracy in forecasting monsoon behaviour;
- iii.**To implement next-generation radars, and satellites with advanced instrument payloads;
- iv.**To develop enhanced earth system models, and data-driven methods including the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Language (ML);
- v.**To build capacity by fostering research collaborations with national and international organisations;
- vi.**To improve India's capability in weather forecasting across different scales i.e. short-term, medium term, extended-range, and seasonal.

Key Progress:

- i.** So far, more than 37 DWRs have been installed across India to bolster real-time monitoring capabilities.
- ii.** The Mausam app facilitates location-specific weather forecasts for 450 cities in India.
- iii.** Seasonal prediction models have witnessed significant improvement under the National Monsoon Mission framework.
- iv.** MoES has initiated specialized programs on urban flooding prediction and cyclone monitoring.

About Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES):

Union Minister of State **(MoS)** (Independent Charge, IC)– Dr. Jitendra Singh (Constituency-Udhampur, Jammu & Kashmir, J&K)

SAIL Earns 'Great Place to Work' Certification for 2025-2026

In December 2024, New Delhi(Delhi) based Steel Authority of India Limited **(SAIL)** has been awarded the '**Great Place to Work' certification** for the period January 2025 to January 2026, by the Great Place to Work Institute, India.

- This marks the 2nd consecutive year SAIL has earned this recognition, having previously received it for December 2023 to December 2024.
- i.** The certification is awarded after a thorough evaluation of an organization's workplace culture, including extensive employee feedback.
- ii.** With this certification, SAIL aims to continue expanding its HR programs and employee engagement initiatives, ensuring a resilient, well-equipped workforce.
- Key programs include flexible work policies like Work from Other than Workplace(WoW), advanced Information Technology and digital training in partnership with National Association of Software and Service Companies(NASSCOM), leadership development programs with IIMs, enhanced healthcare services with Deloitte, and e-learning platforms such as LinkedIn Learning Hub and e-Pathshala.

According to the study published in an indexed medical journal '**Nature Aging**', India ranked at **123rd** position among 143 countries (accounting 95.4% of the world's population) worldwide in terms of its readiness to tackle the challenges posed by an aging population.

- **Switzerland** has secured **1st** position with the highest score of **82.3**, followed by Norway and Denmark ranked at **2nd** and **3rd** position, respectively.
- Currently, India is the youngest country in the world, with more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65% below the age of 35. But, this scenario will change in the next few decades and Indians will have the largest population of senior citizens.

i.The study was conducted by researchers from the National University of Singapore (**NUS**), Singapore and New York (the United States of America, USA)-based Columbia University, who developed a new measure "**Global Aging Index**".

ii.**Rwanda (143rd)** ranked lowest in the index with an overall score of 36.6, followed by Togo (142nd), Afghanistan (141st), Benin (140th) and Malawi (139th).

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- Currently, India is the youngest country in the world, with more than 50% of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65% below the age of 35. But, this scenario will change in the next few decades and Indians will have the largest population of senior citizens.
- In contrast to India's rank its neighbouring countries ranked better like: Bangladesh (86th), Sri Lanka (94th), Nepal (102nd), and Pakistan (118th).

About Nature Aging:

i.The study was conducted by researchers from the National University of Singapore (**NUS**), Singapore and New York (the United States of America, USA)-based **Columbia University**, who developed a new measure "**Global Aging Index**".

ii.The index measured as well as compared the preparedness of Low-and-Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) and Developed countries, to tackle the challenges of an aging population.

iii.The study assessed **5** key domains: well-being (25%), productivity and engagement (20%), equity (18%), cohesion (17%), and security (20%).

iv.As per the report, the number of people over 65 years across the world is expected to double from 703 million (in 2019) to **1.5 billion (in 2050)**.

Rank of Top 5 Countries:

Rank	Name of the Country
1	Switzerland
2	Norway
3	Denmark
4	Sweden
5	Iceland
123	India

Key Highlights:

i.The study noted that the likelihood of a newborn living to age 90 in high-income countries has increased from 4.8%(in 1950) to 26.7%(in 2024) and is projected to be 50% by 2060.

ii.As per the study, top rankings are mainly dominated by the high-income countries with an average score of 24.9 higher than LMICs.

iii.The study showed that only 5 countries, accounting 3.5% of 143 countries covered, had higher scores for women than men.

iv.Singapore ranked at 10th position in the index and has topped among Asian countries.

- While, ranks of other major countries: the United Kingdom (UK) (14th); followed by Japan (15th); the United States of America (USA) (24th) and China (46th)

iv.Rwanda (143rd) ranked lowest in the index with an overall score of 36.6, followed by Togo (142nd), Afghanistan (141st), Benin (140th) and Malawi (139th).

Domain Rankings:

i.Countries scored lowest in the '**productivity and engagement**' domain with average score of **46.8**, followed by 'equity' (average score of 57.5), 'well-being' (average score of 14.2), and 'security'(average score of 59.3) domain.

- While, countries scored highest for 'cohesion' domain with average score of 60.6.

ii.Country with highest and lowest score across 5 main domains of index:

- Well-being: Singapore (88.8) and Afghanistan (14.9)
- Productivity and Engagement: Switzerland (81.7) and Jordan (18.8)
- Equity: Norway (87.8) and Eswatini (27.4)
- Cohesion: Bahrain (81.3) and Benin (26.0)
- Security: Norway (90.2) and Liberia (24)

iii. India's Ranking on various parameters:

- On universal healthcare access: 106 ; Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were the best.
- On well-being: 141; Singapore, Iceland, and Switzerland were the top three in terms of well-being.
- On cohesion: 127; Bahrain emerged as the most cohesive nation.
- On life satisfaction: 137, while Bahrain (7th) was the best in Asia.
- On physical safety: 67; Singapore ranked 1st.
- On pension: 102; Argentina and Armenia were among the best,
- On mental health: 93; Kuwait was ranked the best
- On food security: 97; Denmark emerged as the best.
- On technology:132, while Iceland, Denmark, and Norway were the top three.

Recent Related News:

According to the 19th edition of [2024 Global Hunger Index \(GHI\): How Gender Justice Can Advance Climate Resilience and Zero Hunger](#), India has been ranked at **105th** position among 127 countries with overall score of **27.3**.

- As per the report, India is among **42** countries that have been placed under the "serious" category, alongside Pakistan (109th) and Afghanistan (116th).
- It was published by Irish humanitarian organisation **Concern Worldwide** and German aid agency **Welthungerhilfe**, with aim to trigger action to reduce hunger around the world.

Sevdalinka: Bosnia's 'Balkan Blues' Gains UNESCO Recognition

In December 2024, **Sevdalinka**, a melancholic and ancient love song from Bosnia and Herzegovina, was added to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO's) National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (**ICH**). This recognition ensures that the tradition is safeguarded and celebrated, both nationally and internationally.

- The song, which dates back to the **16th century**, is often referred to as the '**Balkan blues**' due to its emotional depth and soulful melodies.
- ICH means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and individuals recognize as a part of their cultural heritage.

About Bosnia and Herzegovina:

President- Denis Bećirović

Prime Minister (**PM**)- Nermin Nikšić

Capital- Sarajevo

Currency- Bosnia-Herzegovina Convertible Mark (**BAM**)

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- The song dates back to the **16th century**, referred to as the '**Balkan blues**' due to its emotional depth and soulful melodies.

What is Sevdalinka?

i. Sevdalinka, often referred to as the “**Balkan Blues**,” is a traditional form of South Slavic music originating from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- Sevdalinka blends South Slavic oral poetry with the musical influences of the **Ottoman Empire**.

ii. The song has been passed down through generations and was typically performed either **a capella** or by traditional instruments like the **saz**, a long-necked **lute** integral to Ottoman classical music.

iii. **Damir Imamovic**: A leading figure in the Sevdalinka revival who got several awards for his creations such as the European Best Album awarded by Songlines and the Transglobal Music magazines for the 2020/2021 period.

- His educational project, **SevdahLab**, serves to share Sevdalinka’s profound cultural legacy worldwide.

Key Practitioners:

- **Enes Salman**, a prominent folk singer, has been singing Sevdalinka since he was 14 and continues to promote the art form.
- **Zanin Berbić**, a music researcher and curator of the Sarajevo Regional Museum, plays a critical role in preserving and teaching Sevdalinka.

About Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH):

i. ICH means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and individuals recognize as a part of their cultural heritage.

- It also includes instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated with such heritage.

ii. According to **UNESCO’s 2003 Convention** for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, ICH is manifested into **5 broad** domains:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage, Performing arts, Social practices, rituals and festive events, Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and Traditional craftsmanship.

India's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list:

As of December 2024, India has **15 ICH elements** on the UNESCO's Representative List of ICH of Humanity.

S.No	Intangible Cultural Heritage Element	Year of Inscription
1	Nawrouz	2024
2	Garba of Gujarat	2023
3	Durga Puja in Kolkata, West Bengal(WB)	2021
4	Kumbh Mela	2017
5	Yoga	2016
6	Traditional Brass and Copper Craft of Utensil Making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab	2014
7	Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur	2013
8	Buddhist Chanting of Ladakh: Recitation of Sacred Buddhist Texts in the Trans-Himalayan Ladakh region, Jammu and Kashmir, India	2012
9	Mudiyettu, Ritual Theatre and Dance Drama of Kerala	2010
10	Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances of Rajasthan	2010
11	Chhau Dance	2010
12	Ramman, Religious Festival and Ritual Theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India	2009
13	Ramlila, the Traditional Performance of the Ramayana	2008
14	Tradition of Vedic Chanting	2008
15	Kutiyattam, Sanskrit Theater	2008

Note: The Sangeet Natak Akademi, under the Ministry of Culture(MoC), manages intangible cultural heritage.

About Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Prime Minister(**PM**)– Nermin Nikšić

Capital- Sarajevo

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BANKING & FINANCE

RBI released the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24

The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** has released the [Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24](#) under **Section 36(2)** of the **Banking Regulation Act, 1949**.

- It presents the performance of the banking sector, including commercial banks, co-operative banks and non-banking financial institutions, during 2023-24 and 2024-25 so far.

Banks' profitability improves for 6th year in row in FY24

i. According to RBI's report, profitability of the commercial banks in India increased for the **6th** consecutive year in 2023-2024.

ii. The banks witnessed a **Return on Assets (RoA)** of **1.4%** and a **Return on Equity (RoE)** of **14.6%** in Financial Year (FY) 2024 with profitability remaining robust in the first half of FY25.

The report showed that the banks' **gross non-performing assets ratio (NPA)**, or the proportion of bad assets to total loans, declined to a **13-year low of 2.5%** at end of September from 2.7% at end-March 2024.

Banking frauds in India rose to 18461 cases in H1FY25

i. According to the RBI data, the **number of bank frauds** witnessed a significant increase of 27 per cent year-on-year in April-September 2024 to **18,461 cases** and the amount involved jumped more than eight-fold to **Rs 21,367 crore** as compared to 14,480 cases involving Rs 2,623 crore in FY23.

CRAR of SCBs was 16.8% at end-September 2024

The report showed that the **capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR)** of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) was **16.8%** in September 2024, with all bank groups meeting the regulatory minimum requirement and the common equity tier 1 (CET1) ratio requirement.

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iii.In order to close the credit-deposit gap, the banks had to raise their deposit rates and borrow money at higher interest rates.

- Thus, the **interest expense-to-income** ratio, increased to **57.4%** in FY24, compared to 52.2% in FY23 leading to a slowed growth rate in operating and net profits.
- At the end of March 2023, there was a total on year rise in **net profit** of **44.6%**, while **operating profit** had climbed **18.2%**.

iv.Net profit of the scheduled commercial banks increased by 32.8 per cent to Rs 3,49,603 crore during the last fiscal.

- At end-March 2024, India's commercial banking sector consisted of 12 public sector banks (PSBs), 21 private sector banks (PVBs), 45 foreign banks (FBs), 12 SFBs, six PBs, 43 RRBs, and two LABs. Out of these 141 commercial banks, 137 were classified as scheduled banks, while four were non-scheduled.

Banks' GNPA Hit 13-Year Low

i. The report showed that the banks' **gross non-performing assets ratio** (NPA), or the proportion of bad assets to total loans, declined to a **13-year low** of **2.5%** at end of September from 2.7% at end-March 2024.

- In terms of asset quality, gross non-performing assets (GNPA) declined by **15.9%** year on year to **Rs 4.8 lakh crore** as of March 31, 2024.

ii. **Net NPA** fell to **0.57%** of total loans in September 2024, from 0.62% at end-March 2024.

iii. While the **agricultural sector** reported the highest GNPA ratio at **6.2%**, retail loans had the lowest ratio at 1.2%.

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ii. The share of **internet** and **card** frauds in the total stood at **44.7%** in terms of amount and 85.3% in terms of number of cases in accordance to the occurrence of frauds in 2023-24.

- In 2023-24, the number of fraud cases reported by PVBs accounted for **67.1%** of the total.
- The total penalty amount more than doubled in 2023-24 to **Rs 86.1 crore**, led by public and private sector banks.

CRAR of SCBs was 16.8% at end-September 2024

The report showed that the **capital to risk-weighted assets ratio** (CRAR) of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) was **16.8%** in September 2024, with all bank groups meeting the regulatory minimum requirement and the common equity tier 1 (CET1) ratio requirement.

- The consolidated balance sheet of **SCBs**, excluding regional rural banks, increased by **15.5%** during 2023-24 wherein share of PSBs fell to **55.2%** while that of PVBs increased to **37.5%**.
- The bank's liquidity coverage ratio (LCR) fell from 135.7 per cent in September 2023 to 128.5 per cent in September 2024

About CRAR Ratio:

i. Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) also known as **Capital to Risk (Weighted) Assets Ratio (CRAR)**, is the ratio of a bank's capital in relation to its risk weighted assets and current liabilities. It is an indicator of a bank's ability to pay liabilities, and respond to credit risks and operational risks.

ii. The minimum CAR requirement for banks in India is set at **9%**, and **11.5%** including the capital conservation buffer, and the Tier 1 capital requirement is pegged at **7%**, both one percentage point above the **Basel III requirements**.

Over 600k loans worth Rs 27,000 cr disbursed on ULI platform

i. According to the report. Unified Lending Interface (ULI), Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Unified Payment Interface (UPI)-like digital public infrastructure in lending space, has provided over **600,000 loans** worth **Rs 27,000 crore**.

- Out of this, about **160,000 loans** amounting **Rs 14,500 crore** are to micro, small, and medium enterprises (**MSMEs**).

ii. Moreover, **12** loan segments have been introduced on the ULI platform, including kisan credit card, digital cattle, MSME (unsecured), housing, personal, tractor, micro business, vehicle, digital gold, e-Mudra, pension and dairy maintenance loans.

Private banks outrun public sector peers in priority lending benchmarks

i. The RBI data reported that PVBs have met priority sector lending (PSL) targets, including sub-targets for major heads in 2023-24, particularly in **agriculture** and have done better than PSBs.

ii. The total trading volume of priority sector lending certificates (PSLCs) increased to **26%** in FY24, primarily led by PSLC-General. Among the four PSLC categories, the **small and marginal farmers** category registered the highest trading volume.

- In the past five years, PVBs have emerged as major sellers of PSLCs accounting for **49%** of total sales in FY24 as compared with **21%** in the case of PSBs.

Note:

i. For the **public** sector, **private** and **foreign** banks, the target is **40%** of adjusted net bank credit (ANBC) or credit equivalent of off-balance sheet exposure, whichever is higher.

ii. For **small finance banks**, the target is higher at **75%**.

About Priority sector lending certificates (PSLCs):

i. **Priority Sector Lending Certificates** (PSLCs) are tradable certificates issued against **priority sector loans** of banks so as that the banks can achieve their specified target and sub-targets for priority sector lending through purchase of these instruments at the time of shortfall and utilizing the surplus to lend more to these sectors.

ii. There are **four** kinds of PSLCs-

- PSLC Agriculture
- PSLC Small and Marginal Farmers (SF/MF)
- PSLC Micro Enterprises
- PSLC General

Below is the table showing allocation of funds to the borrower segments:

Borrower Segment	Target	Public Sector	Private Sector	Foreign	Small Finance
Total Of which:	40/75*	42.6	47.4	41.6	90.6
Total Agriculture	18.0	19.1	18.7	18.6	26.8
Small and Marginal Farmers	10.0	11.2	10.0	11.0	18.2
Non-Corporate Individual Farmers	13.8	14.2	14.0	14.2	25.4
Micro-Enterprises	7.5	8.0	10.2	8.5	32.6
Weaker Sections	12.0	14.1	12.1	12.1	35.8

* Total priority sector lending target for small finance banks is 75%.

NBFC Lending Surges 18.5%, Improved Asset Quality In FY24

i. The RBI report showed that loans and advances of non-banking financial institution (**NBFC**) increased by **18.5%** in FY24, crossing the previous year's growth of 17.4%.

ii. NBFCs have sourced **funding** from **bank** (42.7%) in March 2024. non-convertible debentures (**NCDs**), **Commercial paper** borrowings and external commercial borrowings (**ECBs**) which represented 57.5% of foreign funding.

About Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is responsible for monetary stability, currency management, targeting inflation, regulating the banking system, and setting interest rates. It was established on **April 1, 1935** in accordance with the provisions of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

Headquarters: Mumbai, Maharashtra

Governor: Sanjay Malhotra

RBI Released the Financial Stability Report, December 2024

In December 2024, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) released the half-yearly publication of the '[Financial Stability Report \(FSR\), December 2024](#)' which shows the joint assessment of the sub-committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (**FSDC**) of the potential risks to financial stability and the resilience of the Indian financial system.

- The report covered both international and domestic economic conditions, the performance of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), and the solvency of the insurance sector.
- The report observed that SCBs has been strengthened by strong profitability, decreasing Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and sufficient capital and liquidity buffers.

i.As per the RBI's FSR, the Indian economy is demonstrating strength and resilience thus it has projected that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate will be at **6.6%** in the Financial Year 2024-25 (FY25).

ii.As per the RBI's FSR, the asset quality of SCBs improved further with their Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA) ratio declined to 12-year low of **2.6%** in September 2024.

- The stress test scenario has further projected that GNPA ratio could possibly increase to 3% by the end of March 2026, for 46 banks under the baseline scenario, and 5% and 5.35%, respectively, under two different high risk scenarios.

About Reserve Bank of India(RBI):

Governor- Sanjay Malhotra (26th Governor of RBI)

Headquarter- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established-1 April, 1935

In December 2024, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) released the half-yearly publication of the ['Financial Stability Report \(FSR\), December 2024'](#) which shows the joint assessment of the sub-committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (**FSDC**) of the potential risks to financial stability and the resilience of the Indian financial system.

- The report covered both international and domestic economic conditions, the performance of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), and the solvency of the insurance sector.
- The report observed that SCBs has been strengthened by strong profitability, decreasing Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and sufficient capital and liquidity buffers.

About Financial Stability Report (FSR):

i.The FSR is a biannual report released by the RBI in June and December.

- The report is prepared by the Financial Stability Unit (FSU) and is a joint evaluation by the Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC).
- The RBI published its first FSR in 2010.

ii.The report taking inputs from financial sector regulators i.e. RBI, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) and Ministry of Finance(MoF).

iii.The report assesses the financial system's resilience and the risks to financial stability.

Key Findings:

i.As per the RBI's FSR, the Indian economy is demonstrating strength and resilience thus it has projected that India's Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) growth rate will be at **6.6%** in the Financial Year 2024-25(FY25).

- The report has outlined this growth will be mainly driven by a resurgence in rural consumption, an increase in government spending and investment, robust services exports, declining Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and adequate capital and liquidity buffers.

ii.The report highlighted that India's GDP moderated to **6%** during the 1st half (H1:April to September) of FY25 from the 8.2% and 8.1% growth registered during H1 and H2 of FY24, respectively. The report noted that despite this latest deceleration, India's structural growth drivers' remains intact.

- Central government's debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to decrease to 56.8% by 2024-25 from 62.7% (2020-21). States' outstanding liabilities are projected to decline from 31% to 28.8% during the same period.

iii.The report highlighted that unhedged External Commercial Borrowings (**ECBs**) reached at **USD 65.49 billion**, nearly 34.4% of the total debt increased under this avenue.

- It further mentioned that increase in foreign currency borrowings by NBFCs could potentially pose currency risks to the extent they are unhedged.

iv.The report highlighted that new accretion of NPAs in the retail loan portfolios was led by slippages in the unsecured loan book, at 51.9% as of September 30, 2024.

v.As per the report, Liquidity Coverage Ratio(**LCR**) of the banking system declined from 135.7% (in September 2023) to **128.5%** (in September 2024). This decrease is mainly attributed by an increase in net cash outflows, which is further influenced by an increase in less stable sources of funding.

vi.The report underscored that the overall performance of listed Private Non-Financial Companies (NFCs) has remained stable in 2024 as sales growth Year-on-Year (Y-o-Y) remained at **6.2%** in H1 of FY25 as in H2 of FY24.

vii. Monetary penalties imposed by the RBI on regulated entities from June to November 2024 have decreased by 47% to **Rs 30 crore** as against Rs 57 crore in the same period a year ago.

- Of the total 153 monetary penalties, the central bank has imposed fines on 5 Public Sector Banks (PSBs) and five private sector banks. It has penalised 3 foreign banks, 2 Regional Rural Banks (RRBs), 116 Cooperative Banks (CBs), 14 Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), and eight housing financiers.
- NBFCs have healthier balance sheets.

viii. As of December 23, 2024, the liquidity deficit stood at **2.43 trillion rupees**, driven by tax outflows and the central bank's foreign exchange interventions.

India's GNPA Ratio Declined to 12-year Low to 2.6% in September 2024

i. As per the RBI's FSR, the asset quality of SCBs improved further with their Gross Non-Performing Assets (**GNPA**) ratio declined to 12-year low of **2.6%** in September 2024.

- The stress test scenario has further projected that GNPA ratio could possibly increase to **3%** by the end of **March 2026**, for 46 banks under the baseline scenario, and 5% and 5.35%, respectively, under two different high risk scenarios.
- While, the Net NPA (NNPA) ratio of the SCBs continue to be at around **0.6%**.

ii. Similarly, the report has projected that the Capital Adequacy Ratio (**CAR**) could decrease to **16.5%** in March 2026 in the baseline scenario and decrease to 15.7% and 14.3% in two different high risk scenarios. CAR stood at 16.6% in September 2024.

iv. The Provisioning Coverage Ratio (**PCR**) of SCBs increased further to 77% in September 2024, mainly due to the proactive provisioning by PSBs.

Three Banks Continue to Display Risky Metrics:

- i.**The report showed that at the starting of the 2014, three-fourths(**75%**) out of 33 public and private sector banks examined under the 'Key Risk Indicators (KRIs)' framework were found deficient in 3 or more KRIs.
- ii.**The report noted that only 3 banks accounting 15% of total banking system assets have been found to be deficient in 3 KRIs in September 2024, despite sector-wide improvements.
- iii.**As per the report, loan sector registered the growth of 13.4% 3-Month Moving Average(3-MMA), in September 2024, investments reported lower growth of 7.6% 3-MMA, this resulted into the combined assets (loan +investments) growth of 11.2% (3-MMA), same as deposit growth of 11.2% (3-MMA).
- iv.**The report noted that increase in bank profits as well as increase in equity capital has been a significant additional source of funds, which contributed to an increase in loan-deposit ratio.
 - Also, it observed that bank reliance on borrowings for bridging the financing gap increased as loan growth outpaced deposit growth leading to an increase in loan-deposit ratio.

About KRI Framework:

- i.**This framework was formulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which measures vulnerability of banks by merging the Capital adequacy, Asset quality, Management, Earnings, Liquidity, and Systems(CAMELS) supervisory framework with market-based metrics and flags institutions based on specified thresholds that differ by jurisdictions.
- ii.**The framework evaluates the bank's overall risk based on 5 key indicators: capital adequacy, asset quality, profits, liquidity and market metrics.

Points to Note:

- i.**GNPA is the amount of the debts an establishment or people owe to the organization that has failed to collect their contractual obligations.
- ii.**NNPA is the remaining amount after the bank has deducted the provision for doubtful and unpaid debts from the total GNPA.
- iii.**CAR, also known as Capital to Risk Assets Ratio (CRAR), is the ratio of a bank's capital in relation to its risk weighted assets and current liabilities.
- iv.**PCR is the percentage of funds that a bank sets aside for covering losses due to bad debts.

About Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC):

- i.**The FSDC is a non-statutory apex council under the Ministry of Finance(MoF).The Council is chaired by the Union Finance Minister.
- ii.**The Raghuram Rajan Committee (2008) on financial sector reforms had first proposed setting up of FSDC.

About Reserve Bank of India(RBI):

Governor- Sanjay Malhotra (26th Governor of RBI)

Headquarter- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established-1 April, 1935

RBI's New Guidelines: Closure of Dormant, Inactive, and Zero Balance Accounts from January 1, 2025

The Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) has issued a new guideline starting from **January 1, 2025**, which mandates the closure of 3 types of bank accounts. These include **Dormant Accounts, Inactive Accounts, and Zero Balance Accounts**. This move aims to enhance banking security, reduce fraudulent activities, and improve overall efficiency in banking operations.

i. The RBI also introduced new guidelines for Fixed Deposits (FDs) with Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) which will come into effect from January 1 2025. Key changes include revised premature withdrawal rules.

ii. For small deposits up to **Rs 10,000**, depositors can withdraw the entire amount within three months of depositing without interest.

- For larger deposits, partial withdrawals of up to **50% of the principal amount or Rs 5 lakh** (whichever is lower) are allowed within three months without interest.

The Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) has issued a new guideline starting from **January 1, 2025**, which mandates the closure of 3 types of bank accounts. These include **Dormant Accounts, Inactive Accounts, and Zero Balance Accounts**. This move aims to enhance banking security, reduce fraudulent activities, and improve overall efficiency in banking operations.

- By enforcing this closure policy, the RBI aims to safeguard the financial ecosystem and ensure the banking system remains secure and functional.

Types of Closure Accounts:

i.Dormant Accounts: Accounts that have not seen any transaction activity for continuous **2 years** or more.

- These accounts are highly susceptible to fraudulent activities, as they tend to be neglected by their holders, making them targets for hacking and other malicious actions.

ii.Inactive Accounts: Accounts that have remained inactive for **12 months** or longer will be closed unless reactivated by the account holder.

- The aim is to reduce banking inefficiencies and to minimize the risks related to online fraud.

iii.Zero Balance Accounts: Accounts that have maintained a zero balance for an extended period will be closed.

- These accounts serve little purpose and may be vulnerable to misuse. The closure helps to streamline operations and ensures compliance with Know Your Customer (KYC) norms.

Steps to Avoid Closure for Account Holders':

- **Reactivate Inactive Accounts:** To ensure at least one transaction is carried out if the account has been inactive for over 12 months.
- **Engage with Dormant Accounts:** To visit the branch to reactivate accounts that have been dormant for 2 years.
- **Maintain a Positive Balance:** To avoid keeping an account with a zero balance for long periods.

RBI's new Fixed Deposits(FDs) rules:

The RBI also introduced new guidelines for Fixed Deposits(FDs) with Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) which will come into effect from January 1 2025. Key changes include revised premature withdrawal rules.

- i.** For small deposits up to **Rs 10,000**, depositors can withdraw the entire amount within three months of depositing without interest.

- ii.** For larger deposits, partial withdrawals of up to **50% of the principal amount or Rs 5 lakh** (whichever is lower) are allowed within three months without interest.

- iii.** Additionally, in cases of critical illness, depositors can withdraw the entire principal amount prematurely without interest, regardless of the deposit term.

- iv.** Furthermore, NBFCs will now notify depositors of maturity details at least two weeks before the maturity date, providing more timely updates.

Types of Bank Accounts:

i.Current Account: Designed for businesses, traders, and entrepreneurs requiring frequent transactions.

- Overdraft facility (account holders withdraw more money than they have in their account), No interest earned, Free daily transactions and High minimum balance requirement.
- Ideal For: Businesses and professionals handling high transaction volumes.

ii.Savings Account: A standard deposit account aimed at individuals who want to save money while earning interest on deposits.

- Interest earnings (3% to 7% annually), Limited transactions per month and Zero-balance accounts available, auto sweep facilities, debit cards, bill payments, and cross-product benefits like discounts on demat accounts.
- **Types:** Regular Savings Accounts, Children's Savings Accounts, Senior Citizens' Savings Accounts, Women's Savings Accounts, Institutional and Family Savings Accounts.
- Ideal For: Individuals, students, homemakers, and salary earners.

iii.Salary Account: A type of savings account created to receive monthly salaries.

- No minimum balance requirement, Higher transaction limits and Additional benefits like loan offers.
- Ideal For: Salaried Employees.

iv.Fixed Deposit Account (FD): To invest a lump sum amount for a fixed tenure and earn interest.

- Fixed interest rates (5% to 7.5%), Penalty on premature withdrawal and Safe investment with guaranteed returns
- Ideal For: Individuals looking for secure investments.

v.Recurring Deposit Account (RD): To invest a fixed amount regularly and earn interest.

- Monthly deposit for fixed tenure, Interest rate similar to FDs and Premature withdrawal penalties.
- Ideal For: Individuals with a regular income.

vi.An account that stores shares, bonds, and securities in electronic form for easy trading.

- **Key Features:**Electronic storage of securities, Linkage to trading accounts and Monthly maintenance charges
- Ideal For: Investors in the stock market.
- In India, depository institutions like National Securities Depository Limited (**NSDL**) and Central Depository Services Limited (**CDSL**) oversee these accounts, necessary for stock market trading.

vii. Non Resident Indian (NRI) Accounts:

Non-Resident Ordinary (**NRO**) Account

- Rupee (Re) Account: Allows NRIs to manage income earned in India subject to taxes in India.
- Convertibility: Funds can be repatriated after paying applicable taxes.

Non-Resident External (**NRE**) Account

- Repatriable Funds: Both principal and interest can be repatriated without any restrictions and are not taxed in India.
- Foreign Earnings: Only foreign earnings can be deposited.

Foreign Currency Non-Resident (**FCNR**) Account

- Foreign Currency: Maintained in foreign currency (USD, GBP, EUR, etc.) and are not taxed in India
- Repatriable Funds: Both principal and interest are fully repatriable.

Ideal For: Non-resident Indians managing earnings from abroad or India.

viii. Money Market Account (MMA): Account that offers higher interest rates in exchange for higher balance requirements.

ix. Joint Account: Account shared by two or more individuals, couples, family members, or business partners. All account holders have equal rights to access and manage the funds.

- Shared Ownership, Signatures required to approve large transactions and Beneficiary Rights:

x. Student Account: An account designed for young people, under the age of 24, to manage their finances while studying.

- No Monthly Fees, Lower Minimum Balance Requirements, ATM Access and Limited Services (overdraft limits or loans, which are usually offered to working professionals).

xi. Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA): Offers essential banking services without high charges and provides access to banking services to those who cannot afford regular account charges.

- No Minimum Balance, Free Automated Teller Machine (ATM) Withdrawals, Limited free transactions allowed and Limited Services.
- Ideal For: Low-income individuals or people who need only basic banking services.

xii. Cash Credit Account (CCA): A short-term credit facility extended to businesses that provide businesses with working capital.

- Overdraft Facility and Interest on Used Portion.
- Ideal For: Small and medium-sized businesses for managing day-to-day operations.

xiii. Cash Management Account (CMA): Used by businesses to manage their finances effectively and to optimize liquidity and control cash flow.

- Automated Transfers and Interest on Funds.
- Ideal For: Large businesses with fluctuating cash flow.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Haryana: Karnal Students Honoured by NASA for Asteroid Discovery

Twelve students and two teachers from Dyal Singh Public School in Karnal, Haryana have been honoured by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA)'s International Astronomical Search Collaboration (IASC) for their discovery of a **Main-Melt Asteroid (MBA) TD40** found using data from pan-STARRS telescope ,operated by the Institute for Astronomy at the University of Hawaii, United States.

- **Diksha**, a Class XI student, and her team Aryabhatta consisting of 11 peers under the guidance of Principal Sushma Devgun and Dr. Kaveri Chauhan, received IASC certificates for discovering and registering 11 near-Earth objects.

i.The students spent two years working with expert guidance and using free online software. An asteroid will be named after Diksha, marking a first for any school in Haryana.

ii.Among the 11 solar system objects

discovered by the team, the IASC has classified one as a provisional MBA discovery.

Note: MBAs are asteroids that orbit the Sun within the asteroid belt, a region located between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, about 2.1 to 3.3 astronomical units(AU) ,approximately 195 to 307 million miles) from the Sun.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Sanjiv Ranjan Appointed as Secretary General of IORA

In December 2024, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced that Senior Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer **Sanjiv Ranjan** has been appointed as the **Secretary General** of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (**IORA**) Secretariat in Ebene, Mauritius. He succeeds **Salman Al-Farisi** of **Indonesia**.

- His term will last for **three years** with effect from January 1 2025, until his superannuation on January 31, 2026, or until further orders, whichever occurs earlier.
- Prior to this, he served as the Officer on Special Duty in the MEA.

About Sanjiv Ranjan:

- i. Sanjiv Ranjan joined the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) in 1993 and has since established a distinguished diplomacy career, focusing on multilateral and bilateral cooperation.
 - ii. From 1995 to 2009, he held several diplomatic roles in Indian embassies in Madrid and Lima and at the Permanent Mission of India in New York, the United States of America (USA).
- Additionally, from 2006 to 2009, he served as the Deputy High Commissioner of India to Mauritius.
- iii. He served as India's Ambassador to Argentina (2016-2019), with additional accreditation to Uruguay and Paraguay, and later as Ambassador to Colombia (2019-2022), with accreditation to Ecuador.
 - v. Most recently, he has been serving as an Officer on Special Duty (Secretary Rank) at MEA, Government of India (GoI), handling personnel, establishment, and e-governance.

About Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):

i.Founded in **1997**, IORA is an inter-governmental organization dedicated to promoting regional economic cooperation across the Indian Ocean.

ii.IORA comprises 23 member states: India, Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, France, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

iii.It includes 12 dialogue partners: China, Egypt, the European Union, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, South Korea, the UK, and the USA.

iv.In 2015, IORA was granted observer status at both the United Nation General Assembly(UNGA) and the African Union.

Secretary-General – Sanjiv Ranjan

Headquarters – Ebene, Mauritius

Chair – Sri Lanka

Vice-Chair – India

Note: India will take over the chairmanship from Sri Lanka for the **2025-2027** term.

Vitul Kumar appointed as DG of CRPF

On December 31 2024, the Government of India(GoI) appointed **Vitul Kumar**, a 1993-batch Indian Police Service(IPS) officer, as an **additional charge** as Director General (DG) of Central Reserve Police Force (**CRPF**) upon the superannuation of incumbent DG of CRPF, **Anish Dayal Singh**.

- The appointment order was issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). He will hold the position until regular appointment or until further orders, issued by the MHA.
- The senior IPS officer from the Uttar Pradesh (**UP**) cadre, is currently serving as the Special DG of the CRPF.

About Vitul Kumar:

- i.Vitul Kumar, IPS officer of Uttar Pradesh(UP) cadre, has held various positions within the CRPF.
- ii.In 2009, he was promoted to the rank of Deputy Inspector General (**DIG**).
- iii.He was further promoted to IG in 2012, and to Additional Director General (**ADG**) in 2018.
- iv.In September 2024, he was appointed as the 'Special DG of the CRPF', a position he will hold until his retirement on **August 31, 2028**.

Awards & Honors:

- i.His distinguished service has earned him several awards and honors, including the President's Police Medal (**PPM**) on January 26, 2021 and the Police Medal (PM) on August 15, 2009.
- ii.He was also awarded the 'Director General's Commendation Disc' in Silver on January 26, 2016, and in Gold on January 26, 2018.

About Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF):

The CRPF, initially established as the 'Crown Representatives Police' on July 27, 1939, assumed its current name when the CRPF Act was passed on December 28, 1949.

- The force has since evolved into a substantial and diverse organization with a Directorate, four Zonal Headquarters, 21 Administrative Sectors, 2 Operational Sectors, 39 Administrative Ranges, 17 Operational Ranges, 43 Group Centres & 22 Training Institutions.

Director-General (**DG**)- Vitul Kumar

Headquarters- New Delhi (Delhi)

Established- 1939

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

CCI Approvals on December 31st 2024

On December 31 2024, the Competition Commission of India (**CCI**) has approved the following proposals:

- i.**The certain stake acquisition of Hyderabad (Telangana)-based Fourth Partner Energy Limited (**FPEL**), India's leading renewable energy company focusing on building and financing renewable energy projects jointly by Washington, D.C. (the United States of America (USA)-based International Finance Corporation (**IFC**), a member of the World Bank Group (WBG), Manila (the Philippines)-based Asian Development Bank (**ADB**) and German government's **DEG** (Deutsche Investitions und Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH).
- ii.**Virginia (the USA)-based Mars, Incorporated (**Mars**) to acquire all outstanding equity shares of Chicago (the USA)-based Kellanova (formerly Kellogg Company), a Delaware corporation listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) for **USD 36 billion**.
- iii.**Acquisition of **72.89%** voting share capital in Indore (Madhya Pradesh (MP))-based **Prataap Snacks Limited** by Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Authum Investment & Infrastructure Ltd. (**Authum**), a Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC) registered with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Ms. Mahi Madhusudhan Kela.

About Competition Commission of India(CCI):

It is a statutory body constituted under Competition Act, 2002.

Chairman- Ravneet Kaur

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2003

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iii.Acquisition of **72.89%** voting share capital in Indore (Madhya Pradesh, MP)-based **Prataap Snacks Limited** by Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Authum Investment & Infrastructure Limited(**Authum**), a Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC) registered with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Ms. Mahi Madhusudhan Kela.

CCI Approved Stake Acquisition Jointly by IFC, ADB and DEC in Fourth Partner Energy Limited

The CCI has approved the Washington, D.C. (the USA)-based International Finance Corporation (**IFC**), a member of the World Bank Group (WBG), Manila (the Philippines)-based Asian Development Bank (**ADB**) and German government's **DEG** which provides financing, advise, and support to private sector enterprises operating in developing and emerging-market nations, proposal to jointly buy stake in Hyderabad (Telangana)-based Fourth Partner Energy Limited (**FPEL**), India's leading renewable energy company focusing on building and financing renewable energy projects.

- As per the proposed arrangement, **IFC**, an international organisation, constituted in 1956, which aimed to further boost the economic growth in its developing member nations by promoting private sector development; DEG and ADB will collectively invest **USD 275 million** (approximately Rs 2,296.25 crore) in FEPL.
- The consortium's investment will infuse capital to fund FPEL's business expansion plans which include a target portfolio of 3.5 GW of renewable energy assets by 2026.
- Under this arrangement, each entity will acquire a certain percentage of FPEL's (**Target**) share capital through primary subscription and secondary purchase.

CCI Approved the Proposal of Mars, Incorporated to Acquire All Outstanding Equity Shares of Kellanova

The CCI has approved the proposal of Virginia (the USA)-based Mars, Incorporated (**Mars**) to acquire all outstanding equity shares of Chicago (the USA)-based **Kellanova** (formerly Kellogg Company), a Delaware corporation listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) for **USD 36 billion**.

- As per the proposed arrangement, merger sub, a directly 100%-wholly owned subsidiary of Acquirer 10VB8 LLC (Acquirer), will merge with and into Kellanova.
- On completion of the acquisition, Kellanova will become an indirect wholly-owned subsidiary of Mars.

Note: Mars operates its business mainly in three segments: snacking, food and nutrition, and petcare.

CCI Approved Prataap Snacks Buyout by Mahi Madhusudan Kela, Authum Investment

The CCI has approved the proposed acquisition of **72.89%** voting share capital in Indore (Madhya Pradesh, MP)-based **Prataap Snacks Limited** by Authum Investment & Infrastructure Limited (**Authum**), a Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC) registered with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Ms. Mahi Madhusudhan Kela.

- As per the proposed arrangement, Authum, which provides services like: investment in listed and unlisted companies; investment in real estate; among others and Ms. Mahi Madhusudhan Kela will be **Acquirer No.1** and **Acquirer No.2**, respectively.
- Prataap Snacks Limited, a listed company incorporated in 2009, which is engaged in the business of snacks food and its products are featured under the popular 'Yellow Diamond' and Avadh brands will be the **Target** company.

Key Points about Acquisition:

The proposed transaction is divided into two parts:

i. Acquisition by Acquirer No.1 of equity shares accounting **42.33%** of the voting share capital of the Target by a share purchase agreement with sellers like: Peak XV Partners Growth Investment Holdings I, Peak V Partners Growth Investments II and Sequoia Capital GFIV Mauritius Investments.

- While, Acquirer No.2 will buy equity shares accounting for 4.54% of the Voting Share Capital of the Target from the above mentioned – sellers. It will result in combined acquisition of equity shares accounting **46.87%** of the Voting Share Capital in the Target Company.

ii. Both Acquirers had publicly announced an Open offer to purchase up to 62.98 lakh fully paid-up equity shares, each with face value of Rs 5, from the company's public shareholders. This accounts for 26.01% of the voting share capital of the target company.

iii. Following the completion of acquisition, the Acquirer No.1 will become the promoter of the Target and Acquirer No.2 will become a member of the promoter group of the Target.

About Competition Commission of India(CCI):

It is a statutory body constituted under Competition Act, 2002.

Chairman- Ravneet Kaur

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2003

ENVIRONMENT

Discovery of new species of *Stellaria* in WB named as *Stellaria bengalensis*

In December 2024, Researchers identified a new species of the genus ***Stellaria*** (family Caryophyllaceae) in Kalimpong, **West Bengal** (WB), marking the 2nd *Stellaria* species reported in 2024. The species was named as '***Stellaria bengalensis***'. A paper on the finding was published in the journal **Phytotaxa**.

- The 1st discovery was found in Nelliampathy Hills, Palakkad , Kerala in May 2024 and was named as '***Stellaria mcclintockiae***'.
- It was discovered by Arya S, Post-Graduate (PG) & Research Department of Botany, PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore(Tamil Nadu, TN); and Harsh Singh, Centre for Advanced Studies in Botany, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong(Meghalaya).

i.*Stellaria bengalensis* is an annual herb growing to a height of 8 to 10.5 centimetres(cms). It is characterized by white flowers, absence of bract, shorter petals included within the sepal and sharp, pointed seeds. The flowering period of the plant is from May to September.

ii.India is home to around **22 *Stellaria* species**, mostly found in the Himalayan region. The population of the species was assessed as 'data deficient' under International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) criteria.

OBITUARY

Renowned French Indologist and Padma Shri Awardee Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat passed away

On December 28 2024, French-Indian Sanskrit Scholar and Padma Shri Awardee **Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat** passed away at the **age of 88** in Paris, France. He was born on 15 February 1936 in France.

- Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat has received numerous awards including the '**Padma Shri**' award in 2024.

About Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat:

i. Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat , a prominent scholar specializing in Sanskrit and Indian studies was a Professor Emeritus of Sanskrit.

- His thesis, titled "Alamkara-shastra," analyzed the **13th-century** Sanskrit treatise on poetics.

ii. He worked in India from 1963 to 1967 as a member of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (French School of Asian Studies) in Pondicherry.

- He served as a Member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 2000 and served as President in 2010.
- He served as the Vice-President of the Société Asiatique, Paris (2000-2019).
- He conducted training in Sanskrit with traditional Pandits, including N. Ramachandra Bhat and M. S. Narasimhacharya, during his time in Pondicherry.

iv. From 1967 to 2004, he served as a Professor of Sanskrit at the École pratique des Hautes Études (School of Higher Studies), Sorbonne, France.

- Since his retirement in 2004, he has continued to research and contribute to the field as an **Emeritus Professor**.

v. He made contributions to various fields of Indology, including Sanskrit language and grammar (Vyakarana), philology, paleography, epigraphy, poetry & poetics **Tantra**, and the Sanskrit literature of Saiva siddhanta school.

- He has published over **23 books** and more than **250 scholarly articles** on these subjects.

vi. He also did research on Indian religious architecture and iconography, with special focus on Karnataka monuments and **Hampi**.

Awards and Honors:

i.In 2013, he was awarded the 'Mahamaho Padhyaya Honoris Causa' from Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, New Delhi, Delhi.

- He was presented with a Certificate of Honour for Sanskrit from the President of India (2014).

ii.He received the '**Padma Shri**' award in 2024 for his contributions to Sanskrit studies.

iii.He received 'Shree Vanamali Samskruti Seva Award' from the Shree Vanamali Charitable Trust, Mysuru in 2023.

- He has been awarded Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Mérite, and Commandeur de l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques in recognition of his academic and scholarly achievements.

BOOKS & AUTHORS

Former Indian Wicket-Keeper Syed Kirmani Releases His Autobiography in Karnataka

On December 29 2024, Legendary former Indian Cricketer and wicket-keeper **Syed Mujtaba Hussein Kirmani**, an One Day International (ODI) World Cup winner with India in 1983, released his autobiography titled "Stumped: Life Behind and Beyond the Twenty-Two Yards".

- The book was launched on his 75th birthday at Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru (Karnataka) and was published by **Penguin Play**.
- The book was authored over a span of 5 years by Syed Mujtaba Hussein Kirmani and was co-authored by **Debashish Sengupta** and **Dakshesh Pathak**.

i.The book explores the personal glimpses of his life, his cricket journey of both on and off the field and an intense anecdotes from his career bringing the audiences a look into the world of **80s cricket**.

ii.The event witnessed the presence of legendary cricketers, EAS Prasanna, Kapil Dev, Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, VVS Laxman and Infosys founder Narayana Murthy along with Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister (DYCM) D. K. Shivakumar.

IMPORTANT DAYS

Ministry of Defence Declared 2025 as “Year of Reforms”

On January 1 2025, the Ministry of Defence (**MoD**) declared **2025** as the “**Year of Reforms**”, with the objective of transforming the tri-services into a technologically-advanced combat-ready force capable of multi-domain integrated operations.

- This decision was unanimously taken during a meeting chaired by **Rajnath Singh**, MoD with all the secretaries of the MoD to review the progress on various schemes, projects, reforms, among others.

Key Focus Areas:

- i.**As per the MoD, Reforms should aim to further strengthen Jointness & Integration initiatives and facilitate the setting-up of the Integrated Theatre Commands.
- ii.**Reforms should focus on new key areas like: Cyber and Space, and emerging technologies such as: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Hypersonics and Robotics. MoD has outlined associated tactics, techniques and procedures which play an important role in the winning of future wars should also be developed.
- iii.**The wider aim of the reforms will be to make the defence acquisition procedures simpler and time-sensitive to facilitate quick and robust capability development.
- iv.**MoD has also directed for developing a shared understanding of operational requirements and joint operational capabilities through inter-service cooperation and training.
- v.**Reforms should provide technology transfer and knowledge sharing between the defence sector and civil industries and promote Public-Private partnerships (PPPs) by enhancing ease of doing business.
- vi.**Reforms should focus on fostering collaboration among key stakeholders in the defence ecosystem, break silos, eliminate inefficiencies and optimize utilization of resources.
- vii.**MoD should work towards positioning India as a credible exporter of defence products, promoting Research and Development (R&D) and partnerships between Indian industries and foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) for knowledge sharing and resource integration.
- viii.**Reforms should also ensure the welfare of veterans while using their expertise.
- ix.**Reforms should instil pride in Indian culture and ideas, promoting confidence in achieving international

Points to Note:

The MoD has set a target to achieve **defence exports** worth **Rs 50,000 crore by 2029**, which is over 137% larger than the record Rs 21,083 crore (approximately USD 2.63 billion) achieved in the Financial Year 2023-24(FY24).

- This latest data represents a 32.5% increase from the Rs 15,920 crore exported in FY23 and marks a 31-fold growth compared to FY14.

About Ministry of Defence (MoD):

Union Minister- Rajnath Singh(Lok Sabha constituency- Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Sanjay Seth(Lok Sabha constituency- Ranchi, Jharkhand)

STATE NEWS

Sikkim Celebrates Annual Kagyad Dance Festival at Gangtok

Sikkim celebrated the annual **Kagyad Dance festival** at Tsuklakhang Palace in Gangtok,city of Sikkim with great traditional enthusiasm. The festival, observed on the 28th and 29th days of the 10th month in the Tibetan calendar (December), honours the eight Tantrik deities, known as Kagyad.

- Kagyed Dance, also known as Chaam, is a unique Buddhist festival in Sikkim.

i.The festival is celebrated by Buddhists in monasteries, especially at the Old Rumtek Monastery, Phodong Monastery, and Tshuklakhang Palace.

ii.Monks, dressed in traditional attire with ceremonial swords and masks, dance gracefully to the beat of drums and trumpets, telling stories from Buddhist mythology, particularly those of Guru Padmasambhava, who brought Buddhism to Sikkim

Note –Sakewa Silior is a another kind of dance form specific to the Kirat Rai (Khambu) community of the transborder Eastern Himalayan region located in present-day Nepal, Bhutan, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, as well as Sikkim and other states of Northeast India.

- This kind of dance involve dancers mimicking the movements and sounds of birds, animals, and nature, holding cultural significance.

Gujarat launches 'SWAR' platform to overcome language barriers

On December 2024, the Chief Minister (CM) of Gujarat, **Bhupendra Patel**, launched the "SWAR (Speech and Written Analysis Resource)" to overcome language barriers and enhance communication between citizens and the government to Enhance Governance.

- The platform utilizes **Bhashini**, an indigenous Artificial Intelligence (AI) system, developed under the National Language Translation Mission (**NLTM**) by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MoE&IT**).
- i. The SWAR platform integrates Speech-to-Text functionality, enabling citizens to dictate their messages rather than typing them manually, making the process more accessible.
 - ii. The platform will support the CM's Office (CMO) by incorporating AI, Machine Learning (ML), Natural Language Processing (NLP), Open Source Generative AI (GenAI) and Computer Vision to enhance communication and resource management.

4th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Cabinet approvals on January 1,2025

The **Union Cabinet** chaired by the Prime Minister(PM) Narendra Modi has given approvals to various schemes and projects on **1st January 2025**.

i.The Union Cabinet chaired by the PM Modi has approved to continue the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana(**PMFBY**) and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme(**RWBCIS**) till 2025-26 with an overall outlay of **Rs.69,515.71 Crore** from **2021-22 to 2025-26**.

ii.The Union Cabinet has approved creation of Fund for Innovation and Technology (**FIAT**) with an outlay of **Rs.824.77 crore** for integration of advanced technologies in insurance schemes.

iii.The Union Cabinet, has approved to extend the One-time Special Package on Di-Ammonium Phosphate(**DAP**) beyond the Nutrient Based Subsidy(NBS) subsidy at **Rs 3,500 per metric ton** (MT) for the period from **1st January 2025** till further orders to provide DAP to farmers at affordable prices.

- It would be allotted a tentative budget of approximately up to **Rs. 3,850 cr.**

iv.The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) between the Ministry of Cooperation(**MoC**), Government of India(GoI) and the **Ministry of Trade, Indonesia** with an aim to trade **one million metric tons**(MT) of Non-Basmati White Rice (**NBWR**) annually based on production and international prices.

The **Union Cabinet** chaired by the Prime Minister(PM) Narendra Modi has given approvals to various schemes and projects on **1st January 2025**.

The approvals are as follows,

- Continuation of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana(PMFBY) and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme (RWBCIS) till 2025-26.
- Setting up a Fund for Innovation and Technology(FIAT).
- Extension of One-time Special Package on Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP)
- MoU on trade of Non-Basmati White Rice (NBWR) between India and Indonesia

Cabinet has approved the continuation of PMFBY And RWBCIS till 2025-26

The Union Cabinet chaired by the PM Modi has approved to continue the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana(**PMFBY**) and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme(**RWBCIS**) till 2025-26 with an overall outlay of **Rs.69,515.71 Crore** from **2021-22 to 2025-26**.

- The continuation of the schemes will provide the risk coverage of crops from unavoidable natural disasters for farmers till 2025-26.

About Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana(PMFBY):

The PMFBY scheme was launched in **2016** with an aim to provide affordable risk coverage for the crops to the farmers in case of crop failure.

- It is monitored by the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare(**DAC&FW**), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW) and the concerned **State** in co-ordination with various other agencies.
- **Objective:** 'One Nation, One Crop, One Premium'

Risks covered:

- i. Cover yields losses from non-preventable risks, such as natural fire and lightning storms, hailstorms, cyclones, typhoons, tempest, hurricanes, tornados, etc.
- ii. The farmers of a notified area, willing to sow/plant crops are prevented from sowing/planting due to bad weather conditions, will be provided with claims upto a maximum of **25%** of the sum insured.
- iii. Insurance is provided upto a maximum period of **14 days** from harvesting for those crops which are kept in "cut & spread" condition to dry in the field after harvesting.
- iv. Insurance against localized risks i.e. hailstorm, landslide, and Inundation affecting isolated farms in the notified area.

Premium Rate:

Season	Crops	Maximum Insurance charges payable by the farmer (% of Sum Insured, SI)
Kharif	Food & Oilseeds crops (all cereals, millets, & oilseeds, pulses)	2.0% of SI or Actuarial rate, whichever is less
Rabi	Food & Oilseeds crops (all cereals, millets, & oilseeds, pulses)	1.5% of SI or Actuarial rate, whichever is less
Kharif & Rabi	Annual Commercial / Annual Horticultural crops	5% of SI or Actuarial rate, whichever is less

Note: The remaining premium is shared between the central and state governments. In the ratio of 50:50 in normal states and 90:10 in the case of north-eastern.

Exclusions:

Losses due to war and related dangers, nuclear risks, riots, malicious damage, theft, act of enmity, grazed and/or destroyed by domestic and/or wild animals and harvested crop bundled and heaped at a place before threshing in case of post-harvest losses.

Cabinet approves setting up of the FIAT:

The Union Cabinet has approved creation of Fund for Innovation and Technology(**FIAT**) with an outlay of **Rs.824.77 crore** for integration of advanced technologies in insurance schemes.

- The fund will be used to make technological improvements in schemes like, YES-TECH, WINDS, etc as well as Research and Development studies.

Key Facts:

i.Yield Estimation System using Technology (YES-TECH) uses Remote Sensing Technology for estimating yields which have minimum 30% weightage to Technology based yield estimates.

- Madhya Pradesh(MP) has adopted 100% technology based yield estimation.
- Andhra Pradesh(AP), Assam, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh(UP), MP, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu(TN) and Karnataka are currently implementing it.

ii.Weather Information and Network Data Systems (WINDS) involves setting up of Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) at block level and Automatic Rain Gauges (ARGs) at panchayat level.

- Implementation of WINDS to assist state governments will begin in 2024-25.

Cabinet approves Extension of One-time Special Package on DAP till 31 December, 2025:

The Union Cabinet, has approved to extend the **One-time Special Package** on Di-Ammonium Phosphate (**DAP**) beyond the Nutrient Based Subsidy(**NBS**) subsidy at **Rs 3,500 per metric ton** (MT) for the period from **1st January 2025** till further orders to provide DAP to farmers at affordable prices.

- It would be allotted a tentative budget of approximately up to **Rs. 3,850 cr.**

Note: DAP is one of the most widely used fertilizers globally, providing essential nutrients nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) for plant growth.

Key Points:

i. Farmers are provided subsidized prices for **28** grades of Phosphatic and Potassic(P&K) fertilizers through fertilizer manufacturers/importers.

ii. This one-time Special Package was earlier approved from 1st April to 31st December 2024 with an outlay of around Rs 2,625 crore.

Cabinet approves MoU on trade of NBWR between India and Indonesia:

i. The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) between the Ministry of Cooperation(**MoC**), Government of India(GoI) and the **Ministry of Trade, Indonesia** with an aim to trade **one million metric tons**(MT) of Non-Basmati White Rice (**NBWR**) annually based on production and international prices.

ii. It will last **four** years and will be automatically extended for an additional **four** years.

iii. It will be implemented by New Delhi(Delhi) based **National Cooperative Exports Limited** (NCEL), authorized by the MoC.

- NCEL is a cooperative society established in 2023 under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002.
- The initial paid up capital of NCEL is Rs. 500 Cr with contribution of Rs. 100 Cr each by the five promoters and authorized share capital is Rs. 2,000 Cr.

MoF Kept Interest Rate on Small Savings Schemes Unchanged for Q4FY25

In December 2024, the Department of Economic Affairs (**DEA-Budget Division**), Ministry of Finance (MoF) has kept the interest rate on Small Savings Schemes (SSS) unchanged for its 4th Quarter of Financial Year 2024-25(Q4 FY25) i.e. from **1st January 2025 to 31st March 2025** from those notified for Q3FY25.

- This is for the straight **4th** consecutive quarter of FY25 that interest rate on SSS remains unchanged.

Points to Note:

- The Government of India (GoI) had increased the interest rates on most of the small savings schemes through a series of hikes announced since Q3FY23, cumulatively increasing the interest rates in the range of 70 to 250 basis points (bps).
- The PPF rates have remain unchanged since April 2020. It was last changed in April-June 2020, when it declined from **7.9% to 7.1%**.

Interest Rates on Small Savings Schemes for Q4FY25:

Instruments	Rate of Interest from 1st January, 2025 to 31st March, 2025
Savings Deposit	4.0%
1-Year Post Office Time Deposits (POTD)	6.9%
2-Year Post Office Time Deposits (POTD)	7.0%
3-Year Post Office Time Deposits (POTD)	7.1%
5-Year Post Office Time Deposits (POTD)	7.5%
5-Year Post Office Recurring Deposits (PORD)	6.7%

Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP)	7.5% (will mature in 115 months)
Public Provident Fund (PPF)	7.1%
Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY)	8.2%
National Savings Certificate (NSC)	7.7%
Senior Citizens' Savings Scheme(SCSS)	8.2%
Post Office Monthly Income Scheme (PO-MIS)	7.4%
Mahila Samman Savings Certificate (MSSC)	7.5%

About Small Savings Schemes (SSCs):

i. These are savings instruments managed by the GoI to encourage citizens to save regularly.

ii. These SSCs are broadly classified into 3 categories: savings deposits, social security schemes, and monthly income plans.

iii. Interest rates for SSCs are notified on a quarterly basis by the GoI.

- The methodology to determine the interest rates for SSCs was recommended by the **Shyamala Gopinath** Committee in January 2023.
- The committee suggested that interest rates for these schemes should range from 25 to 100 bps above the yields on corresponding government bonds.

iv. Some of these SSCs have some tax benefits such as: NSC, SCSS, SSY and PPF, get tax benefits under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act of 1961.

Recent Related News:

In December 2024, DEA, MoF released its latest [Monthly Economic review for November 2024](#).

- As per the report, Indian economy is likely to grow at 6.5% in FY25 compared to its previous projection of 6.5% to 7%, due to challenges posed by global uncertainties and triggers.

MEA Launches of ONOS Scheme to Enhance Access to Scholarly Resources for Government Institutions

On **January 1, 2025**, the Ministry of Education (MoE) launched **first phase** of the One Nation, One Subscription (**ONOS**), a Central Sector Scheme (**CSS**), aims to provide access to world-class scholarly articles and journals for government-run higher education institutions (HEIs) and central government (CG) research and development (R&D) centers across India.

- The scheme was approved by Government of India (GoI) on **November 25, 2024**, with a budget of **Rs 6,000 crore** allocated for its implementation over **three years**, from 1st January 2025 to 31st December 2027.

Implementation Process:

i.The scheme is coordinated by **INFLIBNET (Information and Library Network)**, an Inter-University Centre based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat under the **University Grants Commission (UGC)**, operating under the **MoE**. Access to journals will be facilitated through a dedicated web portal managed by the INFLIBNET Centre.

ii.The **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)** will periodically review the usage of the ONOS initiative and assess the publications by Indian authors from participating institutions.

[Click Here to Know more](#)

About Ministry of Education (MoE):

Union Minister– Dharmendra Pradhan (Constituency- Sambalpur, Odisha)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Jayant Chaudhary (Constituency- Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Sukanta Majumdar (Constituency- Balurghat, West Bengal, WB)

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About One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS):

The scheme was approved by the Government of India(GoI) in November 2024, with a budget of **Rs 6,000 crore** allocated for its implementation over **three years**, from 1st January 2025 to 31st December 2027.

- The ONOS initiative aligns with the vision of the Prime Minister (PM) of India, Narendra Modi, to enhance the nation's innovation capabilities. In his **Independence Day 2022 address**, he introduced the slogan "**Jai Anusandhan**" emphasizing the need to boost research and development (R&D).
- The scheme aligns with the goals of **Viksitbharat@2047** and the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, which prioritizes the creation of a research-oriented educational framework.

About ONOS phase I :

i.The ONOS phase I is coordinated by **INFLIBNET** (Information and Library Network), an Inter-University Centre based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat under the University Grants Commission (**UGC**), operating under the MoE.

- Access to journals will be facilitated through a dedicated web portal managed by the INFLIBNET Centre.
- During the phase I period, it will provide access to over 13,000 journals for more than 6,300 government academic and R&D institutes including central and state-govt universities and colleges.

ii.All journals will be available through a **digital platform**, making access easy and convenient while reducing administrative challenges.

iii.The subscription fees for journals from 30 publishers under **ONOS Phase I** will be centrally managed by **INFLIBNET**. Institutions not covered in Phase I will continue with their independent subscriptions.

iv.Additionally, the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (**ANRF**) will periodically review the usage of the ONOS initiative and assess the publications by Indian authors from participating institutions.

Note: The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) was established through the ANRF Act, 2023, with the purpose of offering strategic guidance in the areas of research, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

v.This phase will establish the program's framework and ensure that key research resources are made available to a large number of institutions across India.

Key Features:

i. A key feature of the ONOS initiative is the provision of **discounts** on Article Processing Charges (**APCs**), which are typically required by publishers for publishing research articles.

- By negotiating reduced APC rates with publishers, the scheme will enable Indian researchers to publish their work in top-tier journals without facing high financial burden.

ii. The Phase I ONOS initiative benefits approximately 1.8 crore students, faculty, and researchers across various fields, including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), Medicine, Social Sciences, Finance, and Accounts).

iii. Additionally, ONOS allocates Rs 150 crore annually to support researchers in publishing their work in high-quality Open Access (OA) journals.

iv. The scheme ensures equitable access to research resources for institutions in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, helping bridge the gap in knowledge availability.

About Ministry of Education (MoE):

Union Minister– Dharmendra Pradhan (Constituency- Sambalpur, Odisha)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Jayant Chaudhary (Constituency- Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Sukanta Majumdar (Constituency- Balurghat, West Bengal, WB)

MoJS Released Dynamic Ground Water Resource Assessment Report of the Country for the Year 2024

In December 2024, Union Minister **CR Patil**, Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) has released the Dynamic Ground Water Resource Assessment Report for the whole country for the year 2024. The assessment was conducted by Central Ground Water Board (**CGWB**) in partnership with States and UTs, which can be used for taking necessary interventions by various stakeholders.

- As per the report, total annual groundwater recharge in India is **446.90** Billion Cubic Meter (**BCM**).
- The annual extractable ground water resource and annual groundwater extraction for all uses have been assessed as 406.19 BCM and 245.64 BCM, respectively.
- The average stage of groundwater extraction for the country stands at 60.47 %.

MoJS Released Annual Ground Water Quality Report of the Country for the Year 2024

In December 2024, Union Minister **CR Patil**, Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) has released the [Annual Ground Water Quality Report for the whole country for the year 2024](#). This is for the 1st time that a report has adopted a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for groundwater quality monitoring, ensuring uniformity in data collection, examination and interpretation.

- The groundwater assessment was conducted by **CGWB**, which can be used for taking suitable remedial measures and further framing of policies by various stake-holders.

About Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS):

Union Minister- Chandrakant Raghunath Patil (Constituency- Navsari, Gujarat)
Minister of State (MoS)- V. Somanna (Constituency- Tumkur, Karnataka); Raj Bhushan Choudhary (Constituency- Muzaffarpur, Bihar)

About Central Ground Water Board (CGWB):

It works under the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation (DoWR, RD & GR), MoJS.

Chairman- Dr. Sunil Kumar Ambast

Headquarters- Faridabad, Haryana

Established- 1970

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About Assessment Report:

i. Out of the total 6,746 assessment units including blocks, mandals and talukas, in the country, 4,951 (7.34%) assessment units are classified as 'Safe'.

- 711 (10.5%), 206 (3.05%), 751 (11.1%) assessment units have been classified as 'semi-critical', 'critical' and 'over-exploited', respectively.
- Other than these units, there are 127 (1.8%) assessment units, which have been classified as 'Saline'.

ii. The report showed that increase in groundwater recharge is mainly due to increase in recharge from water bodies/tanks and water conservation structures.

iii. Further, analysis of the report shows improvement in ground water conditions in 128 assessment units in India when compared with 2023 assessment data.

- The report observed the overall decline in percentage of over-exploited, critical and semi-critical units.

Key Findings:

i.As per the report, total annual Ground Water (GW) recharge has increased (15 BCM) significantly and extraction has decreased (3 BCM) in 2024 compared to 2017 assessment.

ii.Recharge from tanks, ponds, has increased from 13.98 BCM (in 2017) to 23.4 BCM (in 2024).

iii.The report showed that the percentage of assessment units under 'Safe' category have increased from 62.6% (in 2017) to 73.4% (in 2024).

- While, the percentage of Over-Exploited (OE) assessment units have decreased from 17.24% (in 2017) to 11.13% (in 2024).

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- The groundwater assessment was conducted by **CGWB**, which can be used for taking suitable remedial measures and further framing of policies by various stake-holders.

About the Report:

i.This report offers comprehensive analysis of groundwater quality of the country through background monitoring, trend analysis and hotspot identification.

ii.The report has covered a total of **15,259** groundwater monitoring locations to assess groundwater quality.

Key Findings:

i.The report highlighted significant concerns like: the high concentration of nitrate, fluoride, arsenic, and iron in groundwater. The report found that nearly 20% of the samples exceeded the permissible limit for nitrate, followed by fluoride (9.04%) and arsenic (3.55%).

ii.The report showed that Calcium (**Ca**) is most prevalent cation, followed by Sodium (Na) and Potassium (K) while, **bicarbonate** (HCO_3) dominates the anion content, followed by Chloride (Cl) and Sulphate (SO_4).

- This shows that India's overall water is of Calcium-Bicarbonate type.

iii.The report observed that groundwater quality varies significantly across the country, 100% of the water samples for certain states like: Arunachal Pradesh (AR), Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) met the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standards.

- While, states like Rajasthan, Haryana, and Andhra Pradesh (AP) witnessed widespread contamination.

iv.The report noted that monsoon season showed some improvement in water quality, specifically in areas affected by High Electrical Conductivity (**HEC**) and Fluoride.

States Facing Challenges from Specific Contaminants:

i.Nitrate Contamination: As per the report, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu (TN), and Maharashtra have reported the highest incidences of nitrate contamination, with more than 40% water samples exceeded the permissible limit. This is mainly due to agricultural runoff and overuse of fertilizers.

ii.Fluoride Contamination: States like: Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, AP and Telangana have reported the highest incidences of fluoride contamination.

iii.Arsenic Contamination: As per the report, several states particularly in the floodplains of the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers such as West Bengal (WB), Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Assam and Manipur, as well as areas in the Punjab and Rajnandgaon district in Chhattisgarh have reported the elevated arsenic (As) level i.e. more than 10 ppb.

iv. Uranium Contamination: The report showed that 42% water samples from Rajasthan with Uranium (Ur) concentration exceeded 100 ppb, followed by Punjab (30%).

- Also, groundwater samples from states like: Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, TN, AP and Karnataka identified as over-exploited, critical and semi-critical groundwater stress zones, were found with Ur concentrations more than 30 ppb.

v. States which are most severely affected by high EC value in groundwater: Rajasthan, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, AP and Karnataka.

Key Findings Related to Irrigation Suitability:

i. The report also provides a comprehensive assessment of groundwater quality in India for Irrigation Suitability. It has examined Sodium Adsorption Ratio (**SAR**) and Residual Sodium Carbonate (**RSC**) values, are two main indicators of water suitability for irrigation.

ii. As per SAR classification, 100% of the water samples from North-East (NE) states like: Assam, AR, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura are in the excellent category for irrigation, which means the groundwater in these states is highly suitable for irrigation.

- Some of the other states and Union Territories (UTs) that fall in the excellent category for irrigation: Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Puducherry, Himachal Pradesh (HP), and Kerala.

iii. States which fall in Very High Sodium range and are unsuitable for irrigation purposes: AP (0.96%), Gujarat (1.27%), Haryana (0.34%), Punjab (0.76%), Rajasthan (12.38%) and UP (0.14%).

iv. The report highlighted that **81.49%** of the groundwater samples across India had RSC values less than 1.25 which reflects that the water is safe for use in irrigation.

v. The percentage of unsuitable water samples for irrigation increased marginally from 7.69% (in 2022) to **8.07% (in 2023)**, which indicates a concerning trend of increasing alkalinity and sodicity in certain groundwater resources.

Note:

India is the largest groundwater user in the world (more than 25% of global total). 87% of groundwater extracted is used in the agricultural sector and about 11% in the domestic sector.

About Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS):

Union Minister- Chandrakant Raghunath Patil (Constituency- Navsari, Gujarat)

Minister of State (MoS)- V. Somanna (Constituency- Tumkur, Karnataka); Raj Bhushan Choudhary (Constituency- Muzaffarpur, Bihar)

About Central Ground Water Board (CGWB):

It works under the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation (DoWR, RD & GR), MoJS.

Chairman- Dr. Sunil Kumar Ambast

Headquarters- Faridabad, Haryana

Established- 1970

Govt Forms Expert Panel headed by Ramesh Chand to Revise WPI Base Year 2022-23

On January 2 2025, the Government of India (GoI) formed an expert panel to review and revise the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) base year from 2011-12 to 2022-23 and develop a new Producer Price Index (**PPI**).

- It was notified by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry (**MoC&I**).
- The working group is tasked with submitting its final report to the Office of the Economic Adviser, MoC&I by **June 30, 2026**.

Composition of the Panel:

i. The working group was headed by National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) member **Ramesh Chand**, along with [18 other members](#) from various ministries, public and private sectors.

- The panel includes 8 officials from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoP & NG), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA & FW) and Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (MoCAF & PD) including a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) representative, 5 non-official members from the private sectors.

ii. The panel was also instructed to suggest improvements in the price collection system, decide on the computational methodology for both indices, to enhance the presentation formats of the PPI and to recommend any additional changes that could boost the accuracy and reliability of WPI and PPI data.

Terms of Reference (ToR):

- Reviewing the current commodity basket for both WPI and PPI to reflect economic changes.
- Examining the compilation methodology and proposing improvements.
- Suggesting enhancements to the reliability of the WPI/PPI indices.
- Determining an appropriate linking factor for WPI/PPI.
- Developing a roadmap for transitioning from WPI to PPI.

Key Terms:

i. Wholesale Price Index (WPI): WPI measures the average change in the selling prices of goods sold in bulk by wholesalers to businesses.

- It focuses on the prices of goods at the wholesale or producer level and is used to gauge inflation in the early stages of production.
- The prices of a total of 697 items are tracked under the 2011-12 series of the WPI, which includes 117 primary items, 16 items of fuel and power and 564 manufactured products.

Note:

The WPI was first introduced in **1942**, with the base year set as 1939. Since then, the index has undergone **7 revisions**, each updating the base year to better reflect changes in the economy.

- The base years for these revisions have been: 1952-53, 1961-62, 1970-71, 1981-82, 1993-94, 2004-05, and 2011-12.

ii. Producer Price Index (PPI): PPI is a measure of the average change over time in the selling prices received by domestic producers for their output including prices at various stages of production, from raw materials to finished goods.

- It was increasingly adopted by most G20 countries.

DRDO celebrates 67th Foundation Day in New Delhi

On 1st January 2025, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**) **celebrated its 67th Foundation Day** in New Delhi, Delhi. Union Minister Rajnath Singh, Ministry of Defence (MoD), participated in the Foundation day event and unveiled the DRDO's goals for 2025.

- During his visit, he lauded DRDO for boosting the nation's self-reliance by equipping the Armed Forces with cutting-edge technologies and equipment, while also fortifying the defence sector through collaborations with the private sector.

ii.With 2025 declared as the 'Year of Reforms', DRDO is set to play a vital role in achieving the outlined objectives.

iii.DRDO aims to involve start-ups in its Research and Development (R&D) initiatives to promote idea exchange and

enable the Indian defence sector to develop innovative technologies.

Points to Note:

- As of January 2025, 1,950 Transfer of Technologies (ToTs) for DRDO-developed systems have been handed over to Indian industries, with 256 Licensing Agreements for ToTs signed in 2024.
- Over 18,000 tests were carried out in the last three years, with 5,000 tests conducted in 2024 at the DRDO test facilities.

First Made-in-India Surgical Robot 'SSI Mantra' Installed at Maharashtra's Noble Hospitals

Noble Hospitals and Research Centre in Pune, Maharashtra has installed the '**SSI Mantra**(Multi-Arm Novel Tele Robotic Assistance) surgical robot', the **1st made-in-India** robotic system. This cutting-edge technology, developed by Indian med-tech start-up SS Innovations International Inc, was approved by New Delhi(Delhi) based Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (**CDSCO**).

- It features a modular design with 5 robotic arms with immersive 3D HD headset and 3D 4K imaging system ensuring exceptional visual clarity, assisting surgeons with enhanced control during operations.
- It was used for its 1st successful procedure, a robotic right extended hemicolectomy on a patient diagnosed with colon carcinoma.

i.SS Innovations has become the **1st company** in India to receive CDSCO approval for Telesurgery and Teleproctoring.

ii.The SSI Mantra system was developed in 2017 by **Dr. Sudhir Srivastava**, became the 1st Indian-made surgical robot.

Note:The 1st Indian-made surgical robot system was installed at Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute and Research Centre (**RGCI**) in New Delhi and has undergone successful trials in 26 surgeries. It was later installed in Hyderabad, Telangana and Raipur,Chhattisgarh.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Romania and Bulgaria Become Full Members of Schengen Border-Free Zones

On January 1 2025, **Romania** and **Bulgaria** have officially become full members of the European Union (EU) led Schengen free-travel zones. This announcement came following the approval of EU ministers for full membership of both these countries in the meeting held on December 12, 2024.

- This will now expand the borderless area to 29 European countries whose residents can travel without passport checks, ending a 13-year long wait for the two eastern European countries.

Background:

i.Bulgaria and Romania had successfully completed the Schengen evaluation process set out in their treaties of Accession, taking all the necessary measures to ensure application of all relevant parts of the Schengen acquis.

ii.In 2011, the European Commission (EC) confirmed that both countries have met the technical criteria required for full accession.

iii.Austria voted the full accession of Romania and Bulgaria to Schengen area in 2022.

iv.Both countries, member of the EU since 2007, had partially joined the Schengen zone on March 31, 2024, opening up travel by air and sea without border checks. In December 2024, Austria removed its veto and subsequently paved the way for both countries to become full members of Schengen area.

About Schengen Area:

i.It is the world's largest free travel area that now includes 25 of the 27 EU member states, except **Ireland** and **Cyprus**, and includes 4 member states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA): Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

ii.It was formed under **Schengen Agreement**, international treaty which was initially approved by 5 countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands in Schengen, Luxembourg on June 14, 1985.

iii.In 2023, Croatia became the full member of Europe's border-free Schengen zone.

About Bulgaria:

Capital- Sofia

President- Rumen Radev

Currency- Bulgarian lev (BGN)

About Romania:

Capital- Bucharest

President- Klaus Werner Iohannis

Currency- Romanian Leu (RON)

GoI Announces USD 500,000 Relief Assistance to Vanuatu

On January 2, 2025, the Government of India (**GoI**) announced a relief assistance worth **USD 500,000**(Rs 4.3 crore) to **Vanuatu**, a Pacific island nation, to help with relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts following a devastating earthquake.

- The earthquake, with a **magnitude of 7.4**, struck near the coast of Vanuatu on December 17, 2024, causing widespread destruction and loss of life.

i. Vanuatu is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and has been ranked as the **most at-risk country** globally on the United Nations (UN) World Risk Index(WRI) since it was introduced in 2011.

ii. India has been a reliable partner in humanitarian efforts, especially under the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (**FIPIC**).

- India's commitment to providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) reflects its broader commitment to Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, which is a key part of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative announced by Prime Minister(PM) Narendra Modi in 2019.

BANKING & FINANCE

NPCI extends market cap deadline for UPI apps till 2026

In December 2024, Mumbai, Maharashtra-based National Payments Corporation of India (**NPCI**) announced an extension of the deadline for implementing a 30% market share cap for Unified Payments Interface (**UPI**) providers by another two years to **December 31, 2026**.

- This marks the third time the NPCI has extended the deadline for enforcing the market share cap.
- The NPCI proposed a 30% market share cap in November 2020, giving providers two years to comply. Due to industry opposition, the deadline was moved to 2022, and it was extended to December 31, 2024.

Leading UPI Transactions:

- As of November 2024, Walmart Inc backed **PhonePe**, commanded approximately 47.8% of UPI transactions, and Google LLC's **Google Pay**, which holds **37.02%**.
- After PhonePe and Google Pay, Paytm holds the next position, followed by Navi, Cred, and other players.
- In 2024 alone, UPI transactions surged by 46% , totalling 172 billion, up from 118 billion in 2023.

WhatsApp pay expansion to nationwide UPI users:

- In December 2024, **NPCI** lifted the user limit for onboarding on Meta-owned platform WhatsApp Pay, allowing it to offer UPI services to **over 500 million** users in India, enabling them to make UPI payments.
- In 2020, NPCI set a user cap of one million on WhatsApp Pay, later raising it to 100 million by 2022. This limit has now been removed, allowing WhatsApp Pay to expand its services freely.
- WhatsApp Pay will continue to follow all current UPI guidelines and circulars for Third-Party Application Providers (TPAPs).

About National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI):

NPCI is an initiative of the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) and the Indian Banks' Association (**IBA**) under the provisions of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007
Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Director (**CEO**) – Dilip Asbe

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Founded – 2008

Federal Bank Launches Digital Platform FedOne for Corporate Banking

On January 2, 2025, **Federal Bank**, one of India's leading private sector banks, launched **FedOne**, an advanced transaction banking platform. This strategic move to cater the evolving needs of corporate and small and medium enterprises (**SME**) customers.

- This platform is the result of a 10-month collaboration with **Nucleus Software Exports Limited**, leveraging its **FinnAxia solution** to enhance Federal Bank's digital transformation and elevate the quality of services offered to corporate customers.
- Federal Bank implements FinnAxia® as the technological foundation to build FedOne™, offering improved and streamlined services to its customers

Nucleus Software's Role:

Nucleus Software Exports Limited, which has partnered with Federal Bank in this project, has extensive experience in the financial technology sector.

- It currently supports over 200 financial institutions across 50 countries, managing USD 500 billion in loans in India alone and over USD 700 billion globally (excluding India) and processing more than **26 million daily transactions** through its transaction banking platform.

Note:

As of September 30, 2024, Federal Bank, which operates through 1,546 banking outlets and 2,052 Automated Teller Machines (ATMs)/Recyclers across India, reported a total business mix of **Rs.4.99 Lakh Crore**.

About Federal Bank:

Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Shri Krishnan Venkat Subramanian or Shri KVS Manian

Headquarters– Kochi, Kerala

Established– April 23, 1931

Tagline– Your Perfect Banking Partner

Assam Signed MoU with SBI & UBI for Insurance Benefits

On January 1 2025, the Government of **Assam** signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with the State Bank of India (**SBI**) and Union Bank of India (**UBI**) to offer insurance benefits to state government employees .

- The agreements aim to provide **zero-premium insurance coverage** and additional benefits to more than four lakh permanent state government employees.

About the Agreement:

i.The decision was made in a cabinet meeting in North Lakhimpur, Assam. The Finance Department of Assam was given the authority to collaborate with Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs).

- After discussions with various SCBs, the department finalized the first phase of partnerships with SBI and UBI.

ii.The MoUs will take effect immediately, and a detailed Standard Operating Procedure (**SOP**) is being issued to ensure a smooth rollout and maximum benefits for the employees.

iii.The Treasury Officer at each district headquarters will act as the Nodal Officer for coordination and grievance resolution, working with banks to ensure the smooth implementation of salary benefits and assisting with claim submissions.

iv.Each empaneled bank will designate a Nodal Officer and the contact details of this officer will be included in the SOP issued by the Finance Department, Assam.

Key Benefits:

i.Term Life Insurance offers a minimum coverage of Rs.10 lakh for natural death, which includes death due to illness or accidents.

ii.Accidental Death Insurance provides a minimum coverage of Rs.1 crore.

iii.Permanent Total Disability insurance provides coverage of up to Rs.1 crore.

iv.Permanent Partial Disability insurance provides coverage of up to Rs.80 lakh.

v.Air Accidental Insurance provides a minimum coverage of Rs.2 crore for deaths caused by air crashes.

About Assam:

Chief Minister(CM) – Himanta Biswa Sarma

Governor – Lakshman Prasad Acharya

Capital – Dispur

National Parks (NP) – Kaziranga NP, Manas NP

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

MYAS announced the National Sports Awards 2024

On January 02 2025, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (**MYAS**) announced the recipients of the **National Sports Awards 2024** which will be conferred on **47** sportspersons, coaches, entities and universities under **6 categories** on 17th January 2025 by the President of India, Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi (Delhi).

- The awards were recommended by the selection committee headed by Justice (Retd.) **V Ramasubramanian** of the Supreme Court (SC) along with eminent sports persons, sports journalists and sports administrators.

Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award 2024:

Name of the Sportsperson	Discipline
Gukesh D	Chess
Harmanpreet Singh	Hockey
Praveen Kumar	Para-Athletics
Manu Bhaker	Shooting

About the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS):

Union Minister- Mansukh L. Mandaviya (Constituency- Porbandar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Raksha Nikhil Khadse (Constituency-Raver, Maharashtra)

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Key Highlights:

i. Olympic medallists Manu Bhaker, Harmanpreet Singh, Chess world champion Gukesh D and para-athlete Praveen Kumar were named as the recipients of the 'Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna 2024 award'.

ii. Gukesh D became the youngest World Chess Champion at the 2024 Chess World Championship in Singapore. He is only the 2nd Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the title.

iii. Harmanpreet Singh, one of the top drag-flickers in modern hockey led the Indian hockey team to its 2nd consecutive bronze medal at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

iv. Praveen Kumar won a silver medal at Tokyo 2020 and soared to victory in the men's high jump T64 class at the Paris 2024 Paralympics, setting an Asian record with a 2.08meter (m) jump.

v. Manu Bhaker, 1st Indian woman to win an Olympic shooting medal, securing bronze in the women's 10m air pistol event at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

vi. Chandigarh University (CU), Mohali (Punjab) won the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy 2024 for the record **17th time**.

i. Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award 2024

Number of Awardees – 4

Name of the Sports person	Discipline
Gukesh D	Chess
Harmanpreet Singh	Hockey
Praveen Kumar	Para-Athletics
Manu Bhaker	Shooting

i. It is the highest sporting honour of India, given for the most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sports person over a period of **4 years**.

ii. It was formerly known as the 'Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award' and in August 2021, it was renamed as the 'Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award'.

- **Award** – It comprises a medallion, a certificate, and a cash prize of **Rs 25 Lakh** each
- **First Winner** – Chess Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand
- **Established** – 1991-1992

ii.Arjuna Awards for outstanding performance in Sports and Games 2024

Number of Awardees – 32

Name of the Sportsperson	Discipline
Jyothi Yarraji	Athletics
Annu Rani	Athletics
Nitu Ghanghas	Boxing
Saweety Boora	Boxing
Vantika Agrawal	Chess
Salima Tete	Hockey
Abhishek Nain	Hockey
Sanjay Rana	Hockey
Jarmanpreet Singh	Hockey
Sukhjeet Singh	Hockey
Rakesh Kumar	Para-Archery
Preeti Pal	Para-Athletics

Jeevanji Deepthi	Para-Athletics
Ajeet Singh	Para-Athletics
Sachin Sarjerao Khilari	Para-Athletics
Dharambir Nain	Para-Athletics
Pranav Soorma	Para-Athletics
H Hokato Sema	Para-Athletics
Simran Sharma	Para-Athletics
Navdeep Singh	Para-Athletics
Nitesh Kumar	Para-Badminton
Thulasimathi Murugesan	Para-Badminton
Nithya Sre Sumathy Sivan	Para-Badminton
Manisha Ramadass	Para-Badminton
Kapil Parmar	Para-Judo

Mona Agarwal	Para-Shooting
Rubina Francis	Para-Shooting
Swapnil Suresh Kusale	Shooting
Sarabjot Singh	Shooting
Abhay Singh	Squash
Sajan Prakash	Swimming
Aman Sehrawat	Wrestling

i. It is the 2nd-highest sporting honour of India to acknowledge good performance over a period of the previous 4 years and for showing qualities of leadership, sportsmanship and a sense of discipline.

'**Arjuna Award**' was the highest sporting honour of India before the introduction of the 'Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna' in 1991-1992.

- **Award**– It comprises a Bronze statuette of Arjuna, a Certificate, a Ceremonial Dress, and a Cash Prize of **Rs 15 lakh**
- **First Winner**– 20 Sportspersons
- **Established**– 1961

iii. Arjuna Awards (Lifetime) for outstanding performance in Sports and Games 2024

Number of Awardees – 2

Name of the Sportsperson	Discipline
Sucha Singh	Athletics
Murlikant Rajaram Petkar	Para-Swimming

The Arjuna Award (Lifetime Achievement) acknowledges retired athletes who have not only excelled in their sporting careers but have also significantly contributed to promoting sports **post-retirement**.

iv.Dronacharya Award for outstanding coaches in Sports and Games 2024

Number of Awardees – 5 (3 in Regular Category & 2 in Lifetime Category)

Regular Category:

Name of the Coach	Discipline
Subhash Rana	Para-Shooting
Deepali Deshpande	Shooting
Sandeep Sangwan	Hockey

Lifetime Category: For coaches who have helped sportspersons to achieve excellence over a period of 20 years or more.

Name of the Coach	Discipline
S Muralidharan	Badminton
Armando Agnelo Colaco	Football

It is the sports coaching honour of India for the outstanding and meritorious work of coaches consistently and for enabling sportspersons to excel in international events.

- **Award**– It comprises a bronze statuette of Dronacharya, a Certificate, a Ceremonial dress, and a Cash prize of **Rs 15 lakh** for lifetime achievement and **Rs 10 Lakh** for regular.
- **First Winner**– Bhalchandra Bhaskar Bhagwat (Wrestling), Om Prakash Bhardwaj (Boxing), and Othayothu Madhavan Nambiar (Athletics) in the Regular Category. Athletics coach Kuntal Roy and Hockey coach Rajinder Singh in the Lifetime Category.
- **Established**– 1985 (Regular); 2011(Lifetime)

v.Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puraskar

Number of Awardee – 1

Name of the Entity
Physical Education Foundation of India

It is given to corporate entities (both in private and public sector), Sports Control Boards, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), including sports bodies at the State and National level, who have played a visible role in the area of sports promotion and development.

- **Award**– A citation and a Trophy
- **First Winners**– Railways Sports Promotion Board, & Tata Steel
- **Established**-2009

vi.Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy 2024

Number of Awardees – 3

Name of the University	Rank
Chandigarh University, Punjab	Overall winner University
Lovely Professional University, Punjab	1st runner up University
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab	2nd runner up University

The Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy is awarded to the top-performing university at the Khelo India University Games. This trophy recognizes institutions that foster talent and contribute significantly to sports development.

- **Awards**– A rolling MAKA trophy and a cash prize of **Rs 15 Lakh**
- **First Winner**-Bombay University, Mumbai
- **Established**– 1956-57

Recent Related News:

In November 2024, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MoYAS) announced the discontinuation of the Dhyan Chand Award for lifetime achievement and introduction of the Arjuna Award (Lifetime) with effect from 2024. Arjuna Award (Lifetime) has been introduced in place of Dhyan Chand Award to rationalise the various sporting honours of India.

- The ministry also announced that to recognize the Khelo India scheme, the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy will be given to the University for Overall Top Performance in Khelo India University Games.

About the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS):

Union Minister- Mansukh L. Mandaviya (Constituency- Porbandar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (MoS)- Raksha Nikhil Khadse (Constituency-Raver, Maharashtra)

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Bhuvnesh Kumar appointed as CEO of UIDAI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**) appointed **Bhuvnesh Kumar**, additional Secretary of the MeitY, as the Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) of Unique Identification Authority of India (**UIDAI**) with effect from January 2, 2025.

- He replaced **Amit Agrawal** who was appointed as the Secretary, Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers (MoC&F) in December 2024.

About Bhuvnesh Kumar:

i. Bhuvnesh Kumar, a 1995-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer from the Uttar Pradesh (UP) cadre, began his administrative service in 1993 and has held pivotal positions both in UP and at the Central Government.

ii. In UP, he served as the **Principal Secretary** in the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

iii. He served as Secretary in charge of Sports and Youth Welfare, Planning, and Vocational Education, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS).

- He also served as a **Joint Secretary**, MeitY, overseeing technology initiatives and governance.

iv. He also served as the Secretary of Finance, Ministry of Finance (MoF), Secretary of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME), MoMSME, Secretary of Technical Education and Divisional Commissioner Department of Land Revenue in the Government of UP.

About Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI):

The UIDAI was initially set up in 2009, as an attached office under the aegis of the Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog).

- The UIDAI was established as a statutory authority in 2016 by the Government of India (GoI) under the MeitY, following the provisions of the Aadhaar Act 2016.
- It is mandated to assign a 12-digit unique identification (UID) number (Aadhaar) to all the residents of India.

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Bhuvnesh Kumar

Headquarters- New Delhi (Delhi)

Anup Kumar Sinha Reappointed As Non-Executive Chairman of Bandhan Bank

In December 2024, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) approved the re-appointment of **Anup Kumar Sinha** as the Non-Executive (Independent) Chairman of the Bandhan Bank Limited. He will hold the office for the period from January 07, 2025 to July 04, 2026.

i.Anup Kumar Sinha, an economist, was the former Director of Heritage Business School ('HBS'), West Bengal (WB) and currently designated as Chief Mentor.

- He has also authored publications on various topics including economics, rural economy, management.

ii.He served **3 terms** on the Board of Governors at IIMC and also as the Dean during 2003-06. He has also served on the Board of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

SPORTS

2024 FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championship- India's Humpy won Rapid's title; Vaishali won bronze in Blitz

The **International Chess Federation (FIDE) World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships 2024** was held from **26th December to 31st December 2024** in Wall Street, **New York**, United States of America (USA).

Key Highlights:

- **Women's World Rapid Championship** – India's **Koneru Humpy** won the women's championship title with 8.5 points after defeating Indonesia's Irene Sukandar in the finals.
- **World Rapid Championship** – In the **open** section, 18-year-old Russian **Volodar Murzin** won the World Rapid Championship.
- **Blitz Championship** – Norway's **Magnus Carlsen** and Russia's **Ian Nepomniachtchi** shared the title with after both players after 3 tie breaking matches.
- **Blitz women's category**, China's **Ju Wenjun** won the blitz title after defeating Lei Tingjie (China) in the finals while **Vaishali Rameshbabu** (2.5 points) won a **bronze**.

The **International Chess Federation (FIDE) World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships 2024** was held from **26th December to 31st December** 2024 in Wall Street, **New York**, United States of America (USA). Five world champions claimed titles across different categories in this tournament for the year 2024.

- **Women's World Rapid Championship** – India's **Koneru Humpy** won the women's championship title with 8.5 points after defeating Indonesia's Irene Sukandar in the finals.
- **World Rapid Championship** – In the **open** section, 18-year-old Russian **Volodar Murzin** won the World Rapid Championship.
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- **Blitz women's category**, China's **Ju Wenjun** won the blitz title after defeating Lei Tingjie (China) in the finals while **Vaishali Rameshbabu** (2.5 points) won a **bronze**.

Note:

- **Open Tournaments:** The total prize money is **USD 1 Million (Rs.8.5 crore)**, and the winner receives USD 90,000.
- **Women's Tournaments:** The total prize money is USD 428,500 (Rs.3.6 crore), and the winner receives USD 60,000.

Key Highlights:

i. This marks Koneru Humpy's 2nd World Rapid Championship title, her first being in 2019 in Georgia. She is the only player besides China's Ju Wenjun to win the title more than once.

- She had won a bronze medal in the **2012** edition of the Rapid Chess Championship in Moscow and a silver in **2024** at Samarkand, Uzbekistan.
- China's **Ju Wenjun** secured the **2nd** spot while Russia's **Kateryna Lagno** won the **3rd** position.

ii. **Murzin** has become the **second**-youngest FIDE World Rapid Champion, after **Nodirbek Abdusattorov** (Uzbekistan), who claimed the title at 17.

- Russian chess players **Alexander Grischuk** and **Ian Nepomniachtchi**, both secured on 9.5 points securing **2nd** and **3rd** spots.
- India's **Arjun Erigaisi** finished at the **5th** spot with 9 points.

iii. Under the Blitz section, this was the **first** Blitz title won by **Ian Nepomniachtchi**.

- Earlier he had won **silver** medals in the 2013, 2015, and 2021 World Rapid championships, the **2014** World Blitz championship, the **2022** World Fischer Random championship, and secured second positions in the **2021** and **2023** Classical World championships.

iv. This win was **Carlsen's eighth** Blitz title (earlier won in 2009, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022, 2023) and **18th** major championship triumph.

- He already is a **five**-time World Chess Champion (won in 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021) and a **five**-time World Rapid Chess Champion (won in 2014, 2015, 2019, 2022, 2023).

Winners

Rapid Chess title

Open Section			Women's Section		
Rank	Winner	Points	Rank	Winner	Points
1	Volodar Murzin (Russia)	10	1	Koneru Humpy (India)	8.5
2	Alexander Grischuk (Russia)	9.5	2	Ju Wenjun (China)	8
3	Ian Nepomniachtchi (Russia)	9.5	3	Kateryna Lagno (Russia)	8

Blitz Chess title

Open Section			Women's Section		
Rank	Winner	Points	Rank	Winner	Points
1	Magnus Carlsen (Norway) and Ian Nepomniachtchi (Russia)	3.5	1	Ju Wenjun (China)	3.5
2	Wesley So (United States of America)	2	2	Lei Tingjie (China)	2.5
3	Jan-Krzysztof Duda (Poland)	0	3	Vaishali Rameshbabu (India)	1.5

West Bengal Wins 78th Santosh Trophy Title in Hyderabad

On December 31, 2024, **West Bengal** (WB) claimed the **78th Santosh Trophy 2024** title by defeating **Kerala** in the final at the GMC Balayogi Stadium in Hyderabad, Telangana. This victory marked WB's record **33rd title** win in the history of the tournament.

i. It is a National Football Championship organised by the All India Football Federation. 31 teams participated in the tournament and played in the Group stage.

ii. Robi Hansda, a skilled striker from WB, was a standout player in the tournament. He was honored with two major individual awards: The **Tulsidas Balaram Player of the Match Award** and the **Peter Thangaraj Player of the Tournament Award**, acknowledging his outstanding performance throughout the competition.

Note: The Santosh Trophy 2023 title was won by **Meghalaya**, who defeated Karnataka in the final to claim the championship.

OBITUARY

Renowned botanist and Padma Shri awardee Dr. K. S. Manilal passed away

Dr. Kattungal Subrahmanyam Manilal, popularly known as K.S. Manilal, a **renowned botanist** and Padma Shri awardee, passed away on January 1 2025, at the age of 86 in Thrissur, **Kerala**. He was born on September 17, 1938 in the Kingdom of Cochin(now Kerala).

- In **2020**, he was awarded the **Padma Shri**, India's fourth-highest civilian honor, for his contributions in the field of science.
- He dedicated nearly 35 years to researching, translating, and annotating the manuscript '*Hortus Malabaricus*', bringing this ancient botanical treasure to the modern world.

i.He introduced 19 new plant species to the scientific community, four of which are named after him.

ii.He has published over 200 research papers and authored or co-authored 15 books.

Dr. Kattungal Subrahmanyam Manilal, popularly known as K.S. Manilal, a **renowned botanist** and Padma Shri awardee, passed away on January 1 2025, at the age of 86 in Thrissur, **Kerala**. He was born on September 17, 1938 in the Kingdom of Cochin(now Kerala).

- In **2020**, he was awarded the **Padma Shri**, India's fourth-highest civilian honor, for his contributions in the field of science.

About Dr.K.S.Manilal:

i.K.S. Manilal was an Indian botany scholar, taxonomist, and a professor at the University of Calicut, Kerala.

- He dedicated nearly 35 years to researching, translating, and annotating the manuscript '*Hortus Malabaricus*', bringing this ancient botanical treasure to the modern world.

ii.In 1971, as a Nuffield Foundation Fellow of the Royal Society, Dr. Manilal carried out botanical research in Britain.

iii.In 1989, he was the founding president of the Indian Association for Angiosperm Taxonomy (IAAT) at the Department of Botany, University of Calicut, Kozhikode, Kerala. He served as the chief editor of *Reedia*, the journal of the IAAT, from 1991.

- He also served as the president of the Botanical Society of India in 1999.

iv.He worked at renowned institutions, including the University of London, England; the University of North Wales, the United Kingdom(UK); the National Museum of Natural History(NMNH),Washington, DC, the United States of America(USA); the Royal Botanical Garden Rijks Herbarium in Washington, DC; and the University of Leiden, the Netherlands. He retired as Head of Botany department, Calicut University.

v.He introduced 19 new plant species to the scientific community, four of which are named after him.

vi.He has published over 200 research papers and authored or co-authored 15 books.

- His other notable works include *Flora of Calicut* (1982), *Flora of Silent Valley* (1988), *Botany and History of Hortus Malabaricus* (1980), *An Interpretation of Van Rheedee's Hortus Malabaricus* (1988), and *Hortus Malabaricus and the Socio-Cultural Heritage of India* (2012).

Awards:

i.He received the Vishwambhar Puri Medal (1990), the Y.D. Tyagi Gold Medal (1998), and the E.K. Janaki Ammal Taxonomy Award (2003) from the Ministry of Environment and Forests(MoEF), Government of India(GoI).

ii.He received international recognition with the Officer of the Order of Orange-Nassau award from the Netherlands, presented by Queen Beatrix in 2012, becoming the first Asian to receive this honor.

About Hortus Malabaricus:

i.*Hortus Malabaricus* (The Garden of Malabar) is a 17th-century Latin manuscript created by Dutch Governor Hendrik Adrian van Rheede.

ii.The 12-volume work, which documented the wide variety of medicinal plants in Kerala, had been nearly forgotten until Dr. Manilal's thorough research brought it back to prominence.

iii.It was published in Amsterdam between 1678 and 1693.

iv.Manilal's translations of the monumental work were published in English in 2003 and in Malayalam in 2008, making it accessible to both researchers and the public.

STATE NEWS

Gujarat Launches 'Atlas to Protect Indian Wolf Habitats'

In December 2024, Gujarat launched the "Atlas of Indian Wolf Habitats" to protect biodiversity and conserve the Indian Wolf. Led by Chief Minister (CM) of Gujarat **Bhupendra Patel**, the initiative focuses on identifying suitable habitats for wolves across 13 districts of Gujarat.

- The atlas was jointly prepared by the Forest Department of Gujarat in collaboration with Gujarat Ecological Education and Research Foundation(**GEER Foundation**).
- The Atlas provides detailed information on wolf habitats, including maps highlighting wolf presence and habitat distribution across 13 districts of the state.

i.According to the data from the 2023 Wolf Census, a total of **222** wolves were recorded in an area of 2,217 square kilometers (sq km).

ii.The 13 districts where wolf habitat was found include Bhavnagar (80), Narmada (39), Banaskantha (36), Surendranagar (18), Jamnagar (12), Morbi (12), Kutch (9), Porbandar (6), Mehsana (3), Navsari (3), Patan (2), Aravalli (1), and Surat (1).

iii.The initiative aims to conserve the wolf, a keystone species essential for maintaining ecological balance and agricultural sustainability. It uses modern technology like remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to give a clear picture of wolf habitats.

5th & 6th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

PM Narendra Modi inaugurates several development projects in New Delhi

Prime Minister (PM) **Narendra Modi** has inaugurated and laid foundation stones of various development projects including 1,675 flats for residents of Jhuggi Jhopri (JJ) clusters and the World Trade Centre(WTC) in **New Delhi**, Delhi on **3rd January 2025**.

- PM Narendra Modi inaugurated two urban redevelopment projects- the **World Trade Centre** (WTC) at Nauroji Nagar and the **General Pool Residential Accommodation** (GPRA) Type-II Quarters at Sarojini Nagar.
- He also inaugurated the Central Board of Secondary Education's (**CBSE**) **Integrated Office Complex** at Dwarka, Delhi which has been built with an outlay of **Rs 300 crore**.
- PM Narendra Modi also commenced the development of **three** new projects in **Delhi University** (DU), New Delhi with an outlay of over **Rs 600 crore**.

About Delhi:

Chief Minister (**CM**)– Atishi Marlena Singh

Governor– Vinai Kumar Saxena

Capital – New Delhi

Prime Minister (PM) **Narendra Modi** has inaugurated and laid foundation stones of various development projects including 1,675 flats for residents of Jhuggi Jhopri (JJ) clusters and the World Trade Centre(WTC) in **New Delhi**, Delhi on **3rd January 2025**.

- The projects are part of the Government of India's(GoI) ongoing efforts to enhance Delhi's infrastructure and improve the quality of life for its residents.

1,675 newly constructed flats for the EWS :

PM Modi inaugurated **1,675 newly constructed flats** for the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) residents of JJ clusters at Swabhiman Apartments in Ashok Vihar, Delhi.

- These apartments have been constructed under the **In-Situ Slum Rehabilitation Project** by the Delhi Development Authority(DDA).

Key Features:

- i. The eligible beneficiaries have to pay less than **7%** of the total of **Rs 25 lakh** been spent on construction of each flat by the government which includes **Rs 1.42 lakh** as a nominal fee and **Rs 30,000** for five years of maintenance.
- ii. The apartments consist of all essential amenities including sanitation, water supply, and community facilities to improve the quality of life for residents.

Two urban redevelopment projects:

PM Narendra Modi inaugurated two urban redevelopment projects- the **World Trade Centre** (WTC) at Nauroji Nagar and the **General Pool Residential Accommodation** (GPRA) Type-II Quarters at Sarojini Nagar.

- The projects have been developed by **NBCC (India) Limited**, formerly known as National Buildings Construction Corporation Limited, under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (**MoHUA**) in order to advance commercial and residential infrastructure in the area.

About the Projects:

- i. The WTC has been built by replacing over 600 worn-out quarters with advanced commercial towers consisting of 34 lakh square feet of commercial space with modern facilities.
 - It is also equipped with sustainable technologies such as zero-discharge concept, solar energy generation, and rainwater harvesting systems.
- ii. The GPRA Type-II Quarters consists of **28** towers with around **2,500** residential houses equipped with modern facilities.
 - The project also consists of harvesting systems, sewage and water treatment plants, and solar-powered waste compactors for an eco-friendly life.

CBSE's Integrated Office Complex:

i. PM Narendra Modi inaugurated Central Board of Secondary Education's **(CBSE) Integrated Office Complex** at Dwarka, Delhi which has been built with an outlay of **Rs 300 crore**.

- It has been constructed and designed sustainably as per Platinum Rating standards of the Indian Green Building Council **(IGBC)**.

ii. It includes facilities like offices, auditorium, advanced data center and comprehensive water management system.

iii. The foundation stone of the Integrated Office Complex was laid in **2019**.

PM Narendra Modi lays foundation stone of Veer Savarkar College at Roshanpura, Najafgarh

i. PM Narendra Modi also commenced the development of **three** new projects in **Delhi University (DU)**, New Delhi with an outlay of over **Rs 600 crore**.

- It includes Eastern Campus at Surajmal Vihar in East Delhi and Western Campus at Dwarka.
- It also includes building Veer Savarkar College at Roshanpura, Najafgarh, with technologically advanced facilities for education.

ii. The Veer Savarkar College will be built at a cost of **Rs 140 crore** in an area of 18,816.56 square metres(sq m).

- It will comprise of facilities like 24 classrooms, 8 tutorial rooms, 40 faculty rooms, department libraries, conference rooms, and a canteen.

About Delhi:

Chief Minister **(CM)**– Atishi Marlena Singh

Governor– Vinai Kumar Saxena

Capital – New Delhi

DFS Secretary Nagaraju Maddirala Launches Revamped e-auction Portal 'BAANKNET'

On January 03 2025, **Nagaraju Maddirala**, Secretary of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance (MoF) launched a revamped e-auction portal 'Bank Asset Auction Network(**BAANKNET**)' in New Delhi, Delhi, designed for the e-auction of properties from all Public Sector Banks(**PSB**).

About BAANKNET portal:

- i.**The portal serves as a one-stop destination for buyers and investors, making it easier to explore a wide range of assets, participate in property e-auctions, and discover valuable opportunities.
- ii.**The portal features listings that encompass a variety of assets, including residential properties like flats, independent houses, and open plots, along with commercial spaces, industrial lands and buildings, shops, vehicles, machinery, and both agricultural and non-agricultural land.
- iii.**The portal supports PSBs in recovering dues, strengthening their balance sheets, and boosting credit availability for businesses and individuals.
- iv.**The collaboration between PSBs, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), and Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) would be critical to the success of this initiative.
- v.**The DFS has conducted training sessions on the features of the '**BAANKNET**' portal for executives of all PSBs and recovery officers in Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRT) to ensure the portal is used effectively and efficiently.

Note: Over 1,22,500 properties have already been transferred to the new BAANKNET portal, ready for auction.

Key Features:

- i.**The platform ensures frictionless user journeys across the entire process, from pre-auction to auction and post-auction, making each step seamless and efficient.
- ii.**The platform features an automated and integrated payment gateway along with Know Your Customer(KYC) tools.
- iii.**It is built on a microservices-based architecture, utilising an open Application Programming Interface(API) that allows seamless integration with third-party services.
- iv.**It offers a dashboard feature for 'Spend Analytics' and various Management Information System (MIS) Reports.
- v.**It provides a dedicated helpdesk and call centre facility, complete with a callback request option.

About Department of Financial Services (DFS):

The DFS, under the Ministry of Finance (MoF), serves as the nodal department for the Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI) sector, administers various Acts related to banking, insurance, and pension sectors.

Secretary – Nagaraju Maddirala

IIT Madras and MoA&FW Collaborate on Project VISTAAR to Digitalize Agricultural Extension

On January 2 2025, the Indian Institute of Technology (**IIT**) Madras, Chennai, (Tamil Nadu, TN) partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare(**MoA&FW**) to launch the **Project** Virtually Integrated System to Access Agricultural Resources(**VISTAAR**) to revolutionize the agricultural extension system through digitalization for farmers across India.

- This project enables **farmers** and **stakeholders** in agriculture to access high-quality advisory services related to crop production, marketing, value addition, supply chain management and government schemes.
- The VISTAAR platform will bridge the gap between these innovations and farmers, ensuring wide adoption and impact.

Key Features of the Collaboration:

i.Integration with Start-ups: The MoA&FW and IIT Madras signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enrich the VISTAAR platform by integrating information about start-ups in the agriculture and allied sectors.

- These start-ups provide innovative solutions that can make farming more sustainable and climate-resilient.

ii.Startup Information: The Centre for Research on Startups and Risk Financing at IIT Madras alongside its incubated startup **YNOS Venture Engine**, has developed an extensive database of over **12,000 start-ups** connected to the agriculture and farming industries.

- This platform will give farmers direct access to these resources, empowering them with new technologies and insights.

iii.Innovation in Agriculture:Connecting farmers with innovative technologies from start-ups to help make agriculture more sustainable and climate-resilient.

iv.Government Schemes Access: To provide farmers with information about various government schemes, making it easier for them to access benefits related to agricultural development and rural welfare.

v.Digitalization of Agricultural Extension:Farmers will benefit from a digital extension system, ensuring timely and accurate information on crop management, value-added services, and relevant government schemes.

ICG and AIIMS Delhi Signed MoU to Enhance Medical Training for Officers

In December 2024, the Indian Coast Guard (**ICG**) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (**AIIMS**) Delhi have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to boost the medical training and capabilities of Coast Guard medical officers.

- The MoU was signed by Surgeon Commodore Sanjay Dutta on behalf of the ICG and Dr. Shailendra Kumar, Comprehensive Resuscitation Training Centre (CRTC) AIIMS Coordinator during an event held at AIIMS Delhi in New Delhi (Delhi).

i.The primary objective of the MoU is to provide specialized training in Indian guidelines for Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and to equip ICG's personnel with critical life-saving skills.

ii.As per the MoU, AIIMS Delhi will provide structured and advanced training to medical officers of ICG, ensuring they are well-prepared to handle medical emergencies in operationally challenged environments.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

India Submits its 4th Biennial Update Report to the UNFCCC

On December 30 2024, India submitted its [4th Biennial Update Report \(BUR-4\)](#) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (**UNFCCC**). The report updates the Third National Communication (TNC) and contains the National Greenhouse Gas (GHG) inventory for the year 2020.

- The report provides in-depth information on national action plans to mitigate emissions, methods to monitor those actions along with information on the financial technological and capacity-building support India has received to tackle climate change.

i. As per the report, India's total GHG emissions, including land use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) has decreased by **7.93%** in 2020 compared to 2019, but it has increased by 98.34% since 1994.

ii. While, India's total GHG emissions, excluding land use, LULUCF, stood at 2,959 million tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO₂e).

- Also, after considering the absorption by forestry sector and land resources, India's net emissions were 2,437 million tonnes of CO₂e.

About UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):

Executive Secretary- Simon Stiell (Grenada)

Headquarters- Bonn, Germany

Established- 1992

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- The report provides in-depth information on national action plans to mitigate emissions, methods to monitor those actions along with information on the financial technological and capacity-building support India has received to tackle climate change.

Note: UNFCCC in its 16th Conference of Parties (COP) had made it mandatory for developing countries to submit updates to their national communication on biennial basis in the form of BUR.

Key Findings:

i.As per the report, India's total GHG emissions, including land use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) has decreased by **7.93%** in 2020 compared to 2019, but it has increased by 98.34% since 1994.

ii.While, India's total GHG emissions, excluding land use, LULUCF, stood at 2,959 million tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO₂e).

- Also, after considering the absorption by forestry sector and land resources, India's net emissions were 2,437 million tonnes of CO₂e.

iii.The report showed that the energy sector emerged as the major contributor to overall emissions (**75.66%**). It is followed by the Agriculture (13.72%), Industrial Processes and Product Use (8.06%), and Waste (2.56%).

iv.India's forest and tree cover, along with other land use, sequestered nearly **522 million tonnes of CO₂e** in 2020, equivalent to decreasing 22% of India's total carbon dioxide emissions in 2020.

- India's forest and tree cover has consistently increased and currently stands at 25.17% of the total geographical area of the country. During 2005 to 2021, additional carbon sink of 2.29 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent has been created.

v.CO₂ emissions, generated from burning fossil fuels, emission of methane from livestock, and increasing aluminum and cement production are the main contributors to the total GHG emissions.

- As per the report, CO₂ emission accounted for 80.53% of total emissions, followed by methane (13.32%), nitrous oxide (5.13%) and others (1.02%).

India's Progress in respect of the NDC Targets:

i. The report highlighted that India's emission intensity of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), decreased by 36% between 2005 and 2020.

Note: GDP emission intensity means to the reduction in the GHG emissions per unit of economic output.

ii. According to the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), the share of non-fossil sources in the installed electricity generation capacity was **46.52%**, by October 2024.

- Also, the combined installed capacity of renewable power, including large hydropower, is **203.22 GigaWatt (GW)** and total renewable power installed capacity (excluding large hydro power projects) has increased 4.5 times from 35 GW (in March 2014) to 156.25 GW.

iii. The installed capacity of various Renewable Energy (RE) sources:

- **Solar energy** has increased 35 times from 2.63 GW (in March 2014) to 92.12 GW (as of 31st October, 2024).
- **Wind energy** has increased more than double from 21.04 GW (in March 2014) to 47.72 GW (as of 31st October, 2024).

About UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):

Executive Secretary- Simon Stiell (Grenada)

Headquarters- Bonn, Germany

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BANKING & FINANCE

SBI Launched Har Ghar Lakhpati RD scheme and SBI Patrons FD scheme

On January 03 2025, the State Bank of India (**SBI**), India's largest Public Sector Bank (PSB), has launched two new deposit schemes namely, **Har Ghar Lakhpati Recurring Deposit(RD) scheme** and **SBI Patrons Fixed Deposit(FD) scheme**.

- Both these schemes are designed to provide customers with greater financial flexibility and enhanced value.

About Har Ghar Lakhpati RD Scheme:

i.It is a pre-calculated RD scheme designed to enable customers to accumulate **Rs 1 lakh** or multiples thereof.

ii.This scheme helps to simplify the process of achieving financial goals, allowing customers to plan and save effectively.

iii.Minors can also avail the benefits of the scheme, thus promoting early financial planning and saving habits.

Note: Tenure of SBI RD account is 12 months or 1 year (minimum) and 120 months or 10 years (maximum).

About SBI Patrons FD Deposits:

i.It is a FD scheme, designed specifically to cater the needs of senior citizens who are 80 years and above.

- It is available to both existing and new term deposit customers.

ii.This scheme offers increased interest rates and is available to both existing and new term deposit customers.

iii.The depositors under this scheme will earn an additional 10 basis points (bps) higher interest rate than what is offered to senior citizens.

SBI's other FD Schemes for Senior Citizens:

i.SBI We- care deposit scheme, offers an interest rate of 7.50% period of 5 years to less than 10 years.

ii.SBI 444 days FD scheme or Amrit Vrishti offers an interest rate of 7.75%. The scheme is available till March 31, 2025.

Recent Related News:

In December 2024, the State Bank of India (**SBI**), India's largest Public Sector Bank (PSB) released its latest Economic Research Department (**ERD**) report. It has projected India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at **6.3%**, lower than the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s projection of 6.6% for Financial Year 2024-25 (**FY25**).

SBI Launched TAB-based Online NRO, NRE Account Opening Facility

On January 02 2025, State Bank of India (**SBI**), India's largest Public Sector Bank (PSB), launched TAB-based digital process for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) to open Non-Resident External (**NRE**) and Non-Resident Ordinary (**NRO**) accounts. This initiative aims to streamline the account opening process through real-time digital verification and a paperless system.

- This initiative was inaugurated by SBI Chairman Challa Sreenivasulu(C.S) Setty and has been made available across SBI branches in India and select foreign offices.

Key Points:

- i.The new TAB-based facility offers real-time account activation, which eliminates the need for physical documentation. Thus, enabling faster activation with minimal delays.
- ii.Under this facility, documents will be verified digitally, making the process more efficient and easy.
- iii.This facility, which uses digital tools to improve the efficiency and convenience of account opening.

About NRE Account:

- i.This account is designed specifically for NRIs who aim to manage their earnings in Indian Rupee (INR).
- ii.It offers various deposit formats such as: Savings, Current, Recurring, and Term Deposits.
 - The maximum and minimum tenure on these deposits is 1 year and 10 years, respectively.
- iii.Interest earned on these accounts is **exempted from income tax** as well as the balances held in these accounts are free from wealth tax.
- iv.NRE accounts can be opened with closed resident relatives on 'former or survivor basis'.

About NRO Account:

- i.This account aims to address the needs of NRIs who want to manage their income earned within India, like: rent, dividends, pensions, among others.
- ii.It offers deposit formats to the account-holder such as: Savings, Current, and Fixed Deposits with an interest rate aligned with domestic rates.
 - The interest earned in this account is subject to tax in India. Funds in this account are also held in Indian Rupees(INR).

iii.It provides limited repatriation i.e. with a limit of up to **USD 1 million** per Financial Year(FY).

About State Bank of India(SBI):

Chairman- Challa Sreenivasulu (C.S.) Setty

Headquarters-Mumbai, Maharashtra

Tag line-Pure Banking, Nothing Else

Established- 1st July 1955

NaBFID Invests Rs 745 Crore in NDR InvIT's Long-Term Bonds

In December 2024, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (**NaBFID**) has invested **Rs 745 crore** in long-term bonds issued by **NDR InvIT**.

i.The funds raised through 15-year bonds (which are rated AAA/stable by Indian ratings agencies) will be used to boost growth strategy of NDR InvIT, including the development of industrial parks and warehousing facilities across key economic corridors of India.

ii.**NDR InvIT**, which is a Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) licensed Infrastructure Investment Trust managed by NDR InvIT managers and sponsored by NDR Warehousing Private Limited.

- NDR InvIT Trust, is the first 'Perpetual Warehousing and Industrial Parks'

InvIT to be listed in the Indian Stock Exchange (NSE).

Note: In September 2024, the Government of India (GoI) notified NaBFID as a 'Public Financial Institution(PFI)' under the Section 2 of the Companies Act, 2013.

CFH Gets SEBI Approval to Launch Mutual Fund Business

Mumbai(Maharashtra) based Cosmea Financial Holdings(CFH) Private Limited, led by Sam Ghosh, was granted approval by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (**SEBI**) to sponsor a Mutual Fund(MF).

- The approval follows the submission of their application in May 2024 has a 6-month window to complete the necessary registration formalities as per the SEBI (Mutual Funds) Regulations, 1996.

i.CFH has partnered with WisdomTree, a global leader in Exchange-Traded Funds (ETFs) and Exchange-Traded Products (ETPs), which manages over USD 100 billion in assets to strengthen its position.

- CFH plans to invest **Rs 200 crore** (USD 23.3 million) in its Asset Management Company(AMC), focusing on Quant and Smart Beta strategies to meet the growing demands of Indian investors.

ii.CFH has secured licenses in Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT) for Category (CAT) III Alternate Investment Funds (AIF) and a Fund Management Entity.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

POWERGRID Signs Green Loan Agreement with SMBC for RE transformation

In December 2024, Gurgaon(Haryana) based Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (**POWERGRID**), a Maharatna Public Sector Undertaking(PSU)under the Ministry of Power(MoP), signed a '**green loan agreement**' with Japan based Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (**SMBC**) at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT) in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

- The loan facility, denominated in Japanese Yen (JPY), is valued at an equivalent of **USD 200 million** with an additional greenshoe option of **USD 150 million**.
- The agreement was signed in the presence of **G Ravisankar**, Director (Finance), POWERGRID, **LK Khajkumar**, Enforcement Directorate (ED) (Corporate Planning), POWERGRID, and other senior officials of SMBC and POWERGRID.

i.The green loan will be utilized for the construction and development of essential infrastructure required for the evacuation and integration of Renewable Energy(RE) into the national grid.

ii.The initiative aligns with the India's Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs) and POWERGRID's commitment to promoting renewable energy, enhancing grid reliability, and advancing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

TATA AIG General Insurance Company Appointed Amit Ganorkar as MD & CEO

Mumbai(Maharashtra) based TATA AIG General Insurance Company Limited has appointed '**Amit Ganorkar**' as its Managing Director(**MD**) and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**), effective from 1st January 2025.

- He succeeds **Neelesh Garg**, who resigned from the company after leading it for over nine years.

i.He previously held the position of MD at Chennai (Tamil Nadu,TN) based Royal Sundaram General Insurance Company. He has also held the role of Chief Operating Officer(COO) at TATA AIG General Insurance.

ii.With over twenty years of experience in the general insurance industry, Ganorkar has specialized expertise in key areas such as sales and distribution, along with product development.

Note: TATA AIG General Insurance Company Limited is a Joint Venture(JV) between the TATA Group and American International Group (AIG), and it began its operations in India on 22nd January 2001.

Jyoti Sharma Named as CEO of NASSCOM foundation

On January 02 2025, **Jyoti Sharma** was appointed Chief Executive Officer(CEO) of National Association of Software and Service Companies (**NASSCOM**) foundation with immediate effect.

- Jyoti Sharma will succeed **Nidhi Bhasin**, who has been appointed as the CEO of Digital Green Trust.

i.Sharma comes with over 20 years of experience in driving social impact, alongside expertise in program development, resource mobilization, and stakeholder engagement.
ii.She has held leadership positions in organizations such as Organic Cotton Accelerator, the European Commission, the World Resources Institute, Magic Bus India Foundation, Action Aid, and Save the Children.

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

SBI Life acquires 10% stake in Bima Sugam India Federation

In December 2024, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based SBI Life Insurance Company Limited (**SBI Life**) has acquired a **10% stake** in Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **Bima Sugam India Federation**.

- The investment, totalling **Rs. 6.6 crore** was made through the purchase of 66 lakh equity shares with a face value of Rs 10 each.

i.The board of directors of SBI Life Insurance has approved an aggregate investment in Bima Sugam, not exceeding 10% of its paid-up equity share capital.

ii.Bima Sugam India Federation is an unlisted company founded on June 18, 2024, and is supported by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (**IRDAI**).

Note: In November 2024, ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company had approved an investment of Rs 5 crore in Bima Sugam.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

N Space Tech tested 'SwetchaSAT-V0' UHF Communication system

In December 2024, Andhra Pradesh(AP)-based startup **N Space Tech India Private Limited** successfully tested its indigenously developed Ultra-High-Frequency(**UHF**) communication system, **SwetchaSAT-V0**.

- The test was conducted on the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle(PSLV) Orbital Experimental Module (POEM-4) platform at Sriharikota, AP.
- The main purpose of SwetchaSAT-V0 is to test a **communication system** that uses UHF waves.

Note: UHF is a type of radio wave used for communication to enhance faster and more reliable communication in remote areas, especially for things like mobile phones and the internet.

Key Points:

i.On January 1, 2025, N Space Tech India Private Limited received its **1st data** set from SwetchaSat-V0 at ISRO's Telemetry, Tracking, and Command Network in Bengaluru (Karnataka).

ii.The payload (SwetchaSat-V0) was part of **ISRO's POEM-4 initiative**, which repurposes the **4th stage** of the PSLV rocket into a stable orbital platform, supporting multiple experimental payloads.

Manastu Space Technologies Tests Green Propulsion System VYOM 2U in Space

On December 31, 2024 Manastu Space Technologies, a space tech start-up founded by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, Maharashtra successfully test-fired its green propulsion system, **VYOM 2U** (self-developed thruster) onboard the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-4 (POEM) in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (UP).

- The green propulsion system is designed to be a non-toxic, environmentally friendly alternative to conventional chemical propulsion systems, utilizing MS289 propellant, a blend of **hydrogen peroxide**, instead of harmful hydrazine-based propellants.

Key Points:

i.The POEM-4 platform, comprising the 4th stage of the PSLV-C60 rocket that launched the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) satellites has been placed in an orbit at an altitude of **350 kilometers** (kms) .

- The mission carries 24 experiments, including 14 from ISRO labs and 10 from private universities and startups.

ii.The test involved the VYOM 2U thruster firing for **30 seconds** (s), causing the POEM-4 platform to tilt by 24 degrees and spin at an angular velocity of **0.5 degree** per second (/s).

- The platform's onboard systems successfully regained control after this maneuver.

iii.The green propulsion system is now at Technology Readiness Level 8 (**TRL-8**), signifying its readiness for **commercial deployment**.

About N Space Tech India Private Limited:

Founder & Managing Director (**MD**)-Divya Ram Kurapati & Raghuram Kothamasu

Headquarters- Tenali, Andhra Pradesh (AP)

Established- December 14, 2020

About Manastu Space Technologies:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Tushar Jadhav & Ashtesh Kumar

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established- 2017

OBITUARY

Veteran nuclear scientist and Padma Awardee Rajagopala Chidambaram Passed away

On January 04 2025, **Dr. Rajagopala Chidambaram**, a profound **nuclear scientist** who played an important role in advancing India's nuclear capabilities, passed away at the age of **88** in Mumbai, Maharashtra. He was born on November 11, 1936.

- He was a key contributor to India's **first** nuclear test in **1974** and the **Pokhran-II** tests in **1998**, which established the country as a nuclear power.

About Rajagopala Chidambaram:

i. Chidambaram was born in **1936** and was an alumnus of Presidency College in Chennai and the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.

ii. He had worked at numerous prestigious positions including **Principal Scientific Adviser** to the government of India (2001–2018), **director** of **Bhabha Atomic Research Centre** (BARC) (1990-1993), chairman of **Atomic Energy Commission**, and **secretary** to the government of India, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) (1993-2000).

- He also worked as a **chairman** of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (**IAEA**) (1994–1995).

iii. He had conducted researches in areas like **high-pressure physics, crystallography**, and materials science that has contributed to modern materials science research in India.

iv. He also had expertise in areas such as energy, healthcare and strategic self-reliance that helped in development of India's science and technology.

v. Besides, he played a key role in developing India's **supercomputing** capabilities and the **National Knowledge Network**.

- He was an integral part of initiatives such as the Rural Technology Action Groups and Society for Electronic Transactions and Security.

Awards and Honors:

i. Rajagopala Chidambaram was honored **Padma Shri** in **1975** and the **Padma Vibhushan** in **1999**.

ii. He has received honorary **doctorates** from several universities and was a fellow of some famous Indian and international science institutes.

World's Oldest Olympic Champion & Hungarian Gymnast Agnes Keleti passed away

On January 2 2025, World's Oldest Olympic Champion, Hungarian gymnast and a Holocaust survivor **Agnes Keleti** passed away at the age of **103** in Budapest, Hungary. She was born on January 9, 1921 in Budapest.

- She was the world's oldest living Olympic gold medalist and the most decorated female Olympian in Hungarian history, with **10 Olympic medals**, including 5 golds, 3 silver and 2 bronze medals.

About Agnes Keleti:

i. Agnes Keleti joined the National Gymnastics Association in 1938 and won her 1st Hungarian championship in 1940.

ii. Her Olympic journey began at the age of 31 where she made her Olympic debut at the **1952 Helsinki Games**, and won her 1st gold medal in the floor exercise along with 1 silver and 2 bronze medals.

iii. In **1956 Melbourne Olympics**, where she captured 4 gold medals and 2 silvers, becoming the most successful athlete of the Games.

iv. Following the 1956 Olympics, she chose to settle in Israel and played a significant role in the development of gymnastics as a coach and educator.

v. She retired from coaching at the age of 75 but continued to mentor athletes and was widely celebrated as one of the greatest gymnasts of all time.

Note: Following the death of Ágnes Keleti, French cyclist Charles Coste(100) became the oldest living Olympic champion.

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Braille Day 2025 – January 4

The United Nations(UN's) **World Braille Day** is observed annually on **January 4** across the globe to commemorate the birth anniversary of **Louis Braille**, the 19th-century French inventor of the Braille writing system. This day emphasizes the importance of Braille as a means of communication for individuals who are blind or partially sighted.

- January 4 2025 marks the observance of **7th World Braille Day** and the 216th birth anniversary of Louis Braille.

i.The day aims to raise awareness about Braille's significance in promoting education, encouraging independence, and ensuring equality for the visually impaired.

ii.World Braille Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly (**UNGA**) on December 17, 2018, through the adoption of resolution **A/RES/73/161**.

- The **1st** World Braille Day was observed on January 4, 2019.

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History and Background:

i.World Braille Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly (**UNGA**) on December 17 2018, through the adoption of resolution A/RES/73/161.

ii.The day honors the pioneering work of Louis Braille, who, at the age of 15, created the Braille system in **1824**.

- The **1st** World Braille Day was observed on January 4, 2019.

Braille: A Tactile System of Communication

i.Braille is a tactile writing system designed specifically for blind and partially sighted individuals.

- It utilizes **6 dots** arranged in a rectangular cell with raised dots in a **3 x 2 pattern** representing letters, numbers & punctuation marks that allows users to read by touch, an accessible way to engage with written content.

ii.Braille and Its Versatility: Braille is not limited to alphabetic and numerical symbols but also extends to musical, mathematical, and scientific symbols and even computer programming enabling users to access a wide range of information.

iii.Before Braille's invention, visually impaired individuals relied on the **Haüy system**, which embossed Latin letters on thick paper to read but was not practical for writing.

- He simplified this process, creating a system that was easier to use and required less training.

About Louis Braille:

i. Louis Braille was born on January 4, 1809, in Coupvray, France. At the age of 3, he accidentally injured his right eye, and by the age of 5, he was completely blind.

ii. His journey towards creating the Braille system began, at the age of 12, when he learned about “**night writing**,” a 12-dot code invented by French Army officer **Charles Barbier** for military communication.

iii. His system was **1st** published in 1829 in his maiden book “Method of Writing Words, Music, and Plain Songs by Means of Dots”, for use by the blind and arranged for them.

iv. He was passed away at the age of 43 on January 06, 1852.

UN’s Role in Promoting Braille:

i. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**UNCRPD**), adopted in 2006, acknowledges the Braille system as a fundamental tool for communication, education, and freedom of expression for people with visual impairments.

ii. In 1949, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) worked toward standardizing Braille, and by 1950, it had helped universalize the Braille alphabet.

- In 2005, UNESCO declared Braille to be as legitimate a language as any other.

Key Facts:

i. According to the World Health Organisation(WHO), over **2.2 billion** people globally face near or distant vision impairment. Approximately 1 billion cases could have been prevented or remain unaddressed.

ii. According to the 2011 Census, India has **5,032,463** individuals with visual impairment, including those with visual impairments, face major challenges in accessing healthcare, education, and employment.

STATE NEWS

Gujarat approves creation of Vav-Tharad as the 34th district

On January 1, 2025, the **Gujarat** cabinet, led by Chief Minister(CM) Bhupendra Patel, approved the decision to divide Banaskantha district into two, creating a new district called '**Vav-Tharad**'. This will bring the total number of districts in Gujarat to **34**.

- The headquarters of the new Vav-Tharad district will be located in **Tharad town**, while **Palanpur** will continue to serve as the headquarters of Banaskantha district.

About Banaskantha & Vav-Tharad district:

i.Banaskantha district has 14 talukas, the highest number of talukas in Gujarat, and is the second largest district in terms of area.

ii.After the split,

- The new Vav-Tharad district will include **eight talukas**: Vav, Bhabhar, Tharad, Dhanera, Suigam, Lakhni, Diodar, and Kankrej, along with four municipalities – Bhabhar, Tharad, Thara, and Dhanera
- Banaskantha district will retain **six talukas**: Palanpur, Danta, Amirgadh, Dantiwada, Vadgam, and Deesa, along with two municipalities – Palanpur and Deesa.

iii.The Vav-Tharad district will cover an area of 6,257 square kilometers (sq km), while Banaskantha will span 4,486 sq km.

The proposal to establish nine new municipalities:

The Gujarat cabinet, headed by CM Bhupendra Patel, approved the creation of 9 new municipal corporations, the first in nearly 14 years, to improve governance and make processes faster, more efficient, and transparent.

- The total number of municipal corporations in the state has increased from 8 to **17**.
- New municipal corporations will be established in Navsari, Vapi, Anand, Nadiad, Mehsana, Surendranagar/Wadhwan, Morbi, Porbandar/Chhaya, and Gandhidham.

i. These changes are in line with (National Institute for Transforming India(NITI) Aayog's vision of 'Cities as Engines of Growth' and Prime Minister(PM) Narendra Modi's policy of 'Je Kahevu Te Karvu' (Honoring Commitments).

ii. The initiative is part of CM Patel's broader vision for 'Viksit Gujarat@2047,' which focuses on the goals of 'Earning Well' and 'Living Well.'

About Gujarat:

Chief Minister (CM) – Bhupendra Rajnikant Patel

Governor – Acharya Devvrat

Folk Dance – Garba, Dandiya Raas, Tippani Juriun, Padhar Dance and Bhavai Dance

7th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

PM Narendra Modi Inaugurates and Lays Foundation Stone for Rs 12,200 Crore Infrastructure and Metro Expansion Projects in Delhi

On January 05 2025, Prime Minister (PM) **Narendra Modi** inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for development projects worth over **Rs 12,200 crore**, including metro expansions and infrastructure upgrades, in Delhi.

- These initiatives aim to enhance regional connectivity and ensure more convenient travel for the public.

i. PM Narendra Modi inaugurated a 13-Kilometer(km) stretch of the **Namo Bharat corridor** between Sahibabad in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh(UP) and New Ashok Nagar in Delhi costing around **Rs 4,600 crore**.

ii. PM Narendra Modi also inaugurated the **2.8-km** Janakpuri-Krishna Park stretch of Delhi Metro Phase-IV, a project worth **Rs.1,200 crore**.

iii. The PM Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the **26.5-km** Rithala-Kundli section of Delhi Metro Phase-IV, valued at **Rs 6,230 crore**.

iv. PM Narendra Modi also laid the foundation stone for a modern campus of the Central Ayurveda Research Institute (**CARI**) in Rohini, New Delhi, to be built at a cost of **Rs 185 crore**.

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- These initiatives aim to enhance regional connectivity and ensure more convenient travel for the public.

Key Attendees: The event was attended by several dignitaries, including the Union Minister **Manohar Lal**, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Lieutenant (Lt.) Governor of Delhi, **Vinay Kumar Saxena**, and Chief Minister (CM) of Delhi, **Atishi Marlena Singh** along with others.

Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) Project:

PM Narendra Modi inaugurated a 13-Kilometer(km) stretch of the **Namo Bharat corridor** between Sahibabad in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh(UP) and New Ashok Nagar in Delhi costing around **Rs 4,600 crore**.

- This is the **first Namu Bharat corridor** in Delhi and will improve travel between Delhi and Meerut in UP.

About Delhi – Meerut RRTS Project:

i.This semi-high-speed rail corridor spans 82.15 km, connecting Delhi, Ghaziabad, and Meerut.

- The corridor will have 22 stations in total, with a mix of elevated and underground structures.

ii.Trains are designed to travel at a maximum speed of 180 kilometers per hour (km/h) with operational speeds up to 160 km/h, cutting travel time to less than 60 minutes for the full corridor.

Janakpuri-Krishna Park Section of Delhi Metro Phase-IV:

PM Narendra Modi also inaugurated the **2.8-km** Janakpuri-Krishna Park stretch of Delhi Metro Phase-IV, a project worth **Rs.1,200 crore**.

- i.**With the addition of Krishna Park Extension station, the Delhi Metro network now comprises 289 stations spanning 394.448 km.
- ii.**This new section will enhance connectivity for key areas in West Delhi, including Janakpuri, Krishna Park, and Vikaspuri, improving travel options for thousands of commuters.

Rithala-Kundli Section of Delhi Metro Phase-IV:

- i.**The PM Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the **26.5-km** Rithala-Kundli section of Delhi Metro Phase-IV, valued at **Rs 6,230 crore**.
- ii.**This new corridor will connect Rithala in Delhi to Nathupur in Haryana, improving connectivity to key areas like Rohini, Bawana, and Narela in Delhi, while extending the Red Line into Haryana.

Central Ayurveda Research Institute (CARI) in Rohini, Delhi:

- i.**PM Narendra Modi also laid the foundation stone for a modern campus of the Central Ayurveda Research Institute (**CARI**) in Rohini, New Delhi, to be built at a cost of **Rs 185 crore**.
- ii.**The facility will **include** administrative, outpatient (**OPD**), inpatient (**IPD**), and treatment blocks, offering advanced healthcare services and supporting research in Ayurveda.

Note: A special AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) visa has been introduced to facilitate foreign nationals in accessing AYUSH treatments in India.

Key facts:

- i.**Over the last 10 years, India has added 752 km of metro lines, making its metro network the third-largest in the world, with over 1,000 km operational.
- ii.**The budget for infrastructure development has grown significantly from Rs 2 lakh crore to over Rs 11 lakh crore in the last decade.

Revolutionizing Digital Commerce: The ONDC Initiative launched by DPIIT, MoC&I

The Open Network for Digital Commerce (**ONDC**), a transformative initiative led by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (**DPIIT**), Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoC&I), Government of India (GoI), aimed at revolutionizing digital commerce in India.

- The initiative also aimed to promote open networks for all aspects of goods and services over digital or electrical networks.
- It was 1st launched as pilot project in **April, 2022** in 5 Indian cities: New Delhi (Delhi), Bengaluru (Karnataka), Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu (TN)), Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh (MP)) and Shillong (Meghalaya).

About ONDC:

i.It is based on **open-sourced methodology**, which uses open specifications and open network protocols independent of any specific platform.

ii.It was incorporated as a '**non-profit**', Section-8 company on December 31, 2021 with an authorized capital of Rs. 500 crore and was incubated at the Quality Council of India (QCI), an independent organisation with DPIIT.

- QCI was joined by Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Protean eGov Technologies Limited as the co-founder for ONDC.

iii.It aspires to create a level playing field for sellers, buyers, and service providers across India, particularly Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

iv.It serves as unified platform where stakeholders can interact freely without constraints of exclusive ecosystems.

About Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC):

Managing Director (**MD**) and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Thampi Koshy

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

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Key Investors of ONDC:

- India's largest Public Sector Bank (PSB), State Bank of India (SBI);
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development(NABARD);
- HDFC Bank Limited;
- Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE);
- Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI);
- ICICI Bank Limited;
- National Securities Depositories Limited (NSDL), among others.

Key Objectives:

- i. Democratization of Commerce:** To break the monopoly of large e-commerce platforms by enabling interoperability across networks.
- ii. Inclusivity:** To promote small businesses, retailers, and local artisans to access the digital marketplace.
- iii. Cost Efficiency:** To reduce the cost of customer acquisition and transaction processing for sellers.
- iv. Market Expansion:** To fix regional and linguistic gaps, bringing untapped markets into the fold of digital commerce.
- v. Customer Empowerment:** To increase options for buyers by offering access to a wider array of sellers.

How ONDC Operates?

ONDC uses open network protocols to provide seamless interaction between participants. It allows buyers and sellers from various platforms to transact with each other using standardized APIs.

Key Components of ONDC:

- i. Decentralised Architecture:** ONDC does not own or operate e-commerce services like conventional platforms. It acts as an enabler for interconnectivity.
- ii. Open Protocols:** ONDC which is based on open standards, ensures that any seller or buyer platform complying to these protocols can participate.
- iii. Role Segregation:** Participants are categorised into different roles like: buyer applications, seller applications, and logistics providers, ensuring clear dissemination of responsibilities.

About MSME TEAM Initiative:

- i.**In June 2024, the Ministry of MSME launched a sub-scheme "MSME Trade Enablement and Marketing Initiative" (MSME-TEAM initiative) under the central sector scheme (CSS) "**Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance**", with total budget outlay of Rs 277.35 crore for a period of 3 years up to March 2027.
- ii.**The primary objective of the scheme is to provide financial assistance to **5 lakh MSMEs** across the country to onboard the ONDC platform, through Seller Network participants, for catalogue preparation, account management, among others.
- iii.**Out of the total target beneficiaries of 5 lakh MSMEs, **2.5 lakh** (50%) MSMEs would be women owned MSMEs.
- iv.**As per the scheme, awareness workshops will be conducted preferably in Tier-2 and Tier-3 Indian cities and MSME clusters for greater outreach, especially among women and Scheduled Caste (SC)/ Scheduled Tribe (ST) owned MSMEs.

ONDC Startup Mahotsav:

- i.**In May 2024, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, organised the "**ONDC Startup Mahotsav**", a 1st of its kind event held in New Delhi (Delhi).
- ii.**ONDC Startup Mahotsav is a unique collaboration between Startup India initiative and ONDC, both are flagship initiatives of DPIIT.

About DRC Portal:

- i.**In February 2024, ONDC in collaboration with QCI launched the DigiReady Certification (DRC) portal, which aimed to assess and certify digital readiness of MSME entities.
- ii.**The certification process examines various aspects of digital readiness, including the presence of important documentation, for online operations, proficiency in using software and technology, among others.

Key Initiatives to Promote ONDC:

i. ONDC has been organising awareness workshops in partnership with various industry associations like: Retailers Association of India (RAI), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), among others, across the country to educate the small sellers and businesses about ONDC and its benefits.

ii. ONDC has developed a Handbook to help sellers, especially 1st-time sellers succeed in digital commerce in 14 Indian languages.

- ONDC is in partnership with Bhashini to enhance app development and e-commerce in Indian languages.

iii. In 2023, ONDC has launched a Feet on Street (**FoS**) program to support the Network Participants (NPs), to identify and educate sellers about the benefits of ONDC.

iv. WhatsApp Bot "ONDC Sahayak" launched in 5 different languages to help sellers and buyers to get access of information about ONDC.

Key Accomplishments of ONDC:

Since its launch in 2022, ONDC has achieved significant milestones:

i. Pilot Programs: It has been implemented successfully in select cities like Bengaluru and Delhi.

ii. First ONDC Fair Price Shop: The Department of Food and Public Distribution (DoF&PD), GoI launched a pilot project to onboard the Fair Price Shops (FPSs) in Una and Hamirpur districts of Himachal Pradesh (HP) on the ONDC.

iii. Expansion of services and products available on ONDC network: The ONDC network was initially launched with only two categories i.e. Food and Beverage (F&B) and Grocery, and have gradually expanded to 11 more categories such as: mobility, fashion, beauty and personal care, home & kitchen, electronics and appliances, among others.

Awards and Recognitions:

i.Global IP Convention (GIPC) bestowed the ONDC with the “Disruptive Technology” award in 2023.

ii.It was awarded with the Start-up of the Year at 14th India Digital Awards (IDA)in New Delhi, Delhi in 2024.

iii.ONDC was honoured with the prestigious National Awards for e-Governance (NAeG 2024) under “Application of Emerging Technologies for providing citizen centric services” during the 27th National Conference on e-Governance (NCeG) held in Mumbai, Maharashtra in September, 2024.

About Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC):

Managing Director **(MD)** and Chief Executive Officer **(CEO)**- Thampi Koshy

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Union Minister Piyush Goyal releases '6th LEADS Report' : 13 states, UTs listed among achievers

On 3rd January 2025, Union Minister **Piyush Goyal**, Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I) released the **6th** edition 'Logistics Ease Across Different States(**LEADS**) Report in New Delhi, Delhi. He stated that the logistics sector will play a crucial role in achieving a USD 32 trillion economy by 2047.

- **Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha** and **Tamil Nadu(TN)** were awarded the top rank of '**achievers**' amongst coastal States in the LEADS 2024 report.
- The event also marked the felicitation of the **LEAPS 2024 awards**. Recognitions were given across various categories, including core logistics services, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises(MSMEs), startups, and institutions.

Key Highlights:

i. Union Minister **Piyush Goyal** proposed the adoption of the LEAD framework – **Longevity, Efficiency** and **Effectiveness, Accessibility** and **Accountability** and **Digitalisation** of processes to efficiently develop the logistics sector.

ii. He also launched the Prime Minister (PM) **Gati Shakti Course of Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya** (GSV), a **15-hour** course on PM GatiShakti Concept for Efficient Infrastructure Planning and National Development was launched during the event.

- The course will be conducted by Integrated Government Online training (**iGOT**) Karmayogi platform and University Grants Commission (UGC) Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds (**SWAYAM**) portal and will be included into the curriculum of Central Training Institutes (CTIs) and State Administrative Training Institutes (ATIs) across the country.

iii. Furthermore, a '**Report on Logistics Cost Framework prepared**' by National Council of Applied Economic Research(**NCAER**) was launched with an aim to assess logistics cost in India through inclusion of Export-Import (EXIM) and domestic cargo data.

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I):

Union Minister – Piyush Goyal (Mumbai North, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (**MoS**)– Jitin Prasada (Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

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Key People:

The event was attended by Union Minister of State(MoS) Jitin Prasada, MoC&I and Amardeep Singh, Secretary, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), MoC&I.

Key Highlights:

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About Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) Report:

i.An indigenous logistics performance index on lines of the World Bank(WB)'s Logistics Performance Index (LPI), called 'Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS)' index for logistics performance monitoring across states has been developed.

- The survey has been conducted annually since 2018. States and Union Territories(UTs) are ranked according to their performance.
- This annual assessment by the DPIIT under the National Logistics Policy, 2022 provides a strategic roadmap for enhancing logistics performance across India.

ii.The objective of the report is to identify areas of improvement and support State Governments to undertake adequate infrastructure, services and regulatory reforms to improve their logistics performance.

iii. The 6th edition of the LEADS report comprises an increased number of objective indicators which includes measures related to **accessibility to terminals** and the **speed of key road corridors** across various States/Union Territories (UTs).

iv.The 2024 LEADS report assesses the logistics performance on the basis of **4** key pillars-

- Logistics Infrastructure
- Logistics Services
- Operating and Regulatory Environment
- **Sustainable Logistics (newly introduced in the survey)**

Performance Categories:

The LEADS report categorizes States based on their geographic demographics into 4 categories – **Coastal Group, Landlocked Group, Northeast Group** and **UTs Group**. Furthermore, the states are graded in the following three categories based on their performances.

i.Achievers– States having exceptional logistics systems including ideal infrastructure and transparent regulatory processes.

- Score- **90% or more** percentage

ii.Fast Movers– States in the process of becoming achievers through progressive policies, legislative initiatives and new infrastructure projects.

- Score- **80% to 90%**

iii.Aspirers– States that have adopted national best practices to improve their contribution in the logistics sector.

- Score- **Below 80%**

LEADS 2024 Index:

In the LEADS 2024 Report, **13 states** and **UTs** have been categorized as Achievers, **17** as Fast Movers and **7** as Aspirers .

Categories	Achievers	Fast Movers	Aspirers
Landlocked States	Haryana, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh(UP), Uttarakhand	Bihar, Himachal Pradesh(HP), Madhya Pradesh(MP), Punjab Rajasthan	Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand
Coastal States	Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu(TN).	Andhra Pradesh(AP), Goa	West Bengal(WB)
Northeastern Region	Assam, Arunachal Pradesh(AR)	Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura	Manipur
UTs	Chandigarh, Delhi	Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir(J&K), Lakshadweep, Puducherry	Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Ladakh

LEAPS 2024 awards :

Category	Winners
Core Logistics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Air Freight Service Provider: Kerry Indev Logistics Private Limited<li>2. Maritime Freight Service Provider: Visakha Container Terminal Pvt Ltd<li>3. Multimodal Transport Operators: Avana Logistek Limited<li>4. Rail Freight Service Provider: DP World Rail Logistics Private Limited<li>5. Road Freight Service Provider: CJ Darcl Logistics Ltd.<li>6. Warehouse Service Provider (Industrial and Consumables): APM Terminals India Private Limited<li>7. Warehouse Service Provider (Agriculture): Globus Warehousing and Trading Private Limited
Startups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Logistics Operations: Myzek Logistics Pvt Ltd<li>2. Logistics Technology: Sarvodaya Infotech Pvt Ltd

MSMEs	1. Logistics Service Provider: Shipwaves Online Limited
Institutions	1. Indian Institute of Management, Mumbai
Special Categories	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Logistics service delivery for e-commerce operations: Delhivery Limited 2. Multimodal logistics service provider: Pushpak Logistics Solutions LLP

[Click here to know more.](#)

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I):

Union Minister – Piyush Goyal (Rajya Sabha, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (**MoS**)– Jitin Prasada (Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh,UP)

EPFO Completes Rollout of CPPS in All Regional Offices

On January 3, 2024, the New Delhi (Delhi)- based Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (**EPFO**) successfully completed the nationwide implementation of the Centralized Pension Payments System (**CPPS**) under the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 1995, aiming to improve the ease of living for pensioners by streamlining pension disbursements across all regional offices.

- The initiative allows pensioners to access their pensions easily from any bank branch nationwide, removing the need for physical verification and streamlining the disbursement process.
- This marks a transition from the current decentralized pension disbursement system, where each zonal or regional office of EPFO has separate agreements with only three to four banks.

About Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO):

Central Provident Fund Commissioner (**CPFC**) – Ramesh Krishnamurti

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Founded – 1952

On January 3, 2024, New Delhi (Delhi) based Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (**EPFO**) successfully completed the nationwide implementation of the Centralized Pension Payments System (**CPPS**) under the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 1995, aiming to improve the ease of living for pensioners by streamlining pension disbursements across all regional offices.

- The initiative allows pensioners to access their pensions easily from any bank branch nationwide, removing the need for physical verification and streamlining the disbursement process.
- This marks a transition from the current decentralized pension disbursement system, where each zonal or regional office of EPFO has separate agreements with only three to four banks.

Key Points:

- i.**In October 2024, the initial pilot of the CPPS was completed at the Karnal (Haryana), Jammu (Jammu & Kashmir, J&K) and Srinagar (J&K) regional offices, disbursing approximately **Rs. 11 crore** in pensions to more than 49,000 EPS pensioners.
- ii.**In November 2024, a second pilot was completed across 24 regional offices, disbursing approximately **Rs. 213 crore** in pensions to over 9.3 lakh pensioners.
- iii.**In December 2024, approximately **Rs. 1,570 crore** in pensions was disbursed to over 68 lakh pensioners through all 122 regional offices of EPFO.

About the Centralised Pension Payments System (CPPS):

i.The **CPPS** enables over 78 lakh EPS pensioners to receive their pensions from any bank branch nationwide, streamlining payments, removing the need for physical verifications, and ensuring seamless disbursement.

- It is implemented by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), New Delhi(Delhi).

ii.It ensures nationwide pension disbursement without requiring Pension Payment Orders (PPO) transfers, even if pensioners relocate or change their bank or branch. This provides significant relief to those retiring to their hometowns.

iii.Pensioners will no longer need to visit a branch for verification when their pension begins, as it will be credited immediately upon release.

iv.CPPS will enable a smooth transition to Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS) in the next phase.

Note: EPFO has invested **Rs. 34,207.9 crore** in Exchange Traded Funds (**ETFs**) in the Financial Year 2024-25(FY25).

About Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO):

The EPFO is a statutory body under the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoL&E) responsible for regulating and managing provident funds in India.

- The board is chaired by the Union Minister of Labour and Employment (**MoL&E**), Government of India (GoI).

Central Provident Fund Commissioner (**CPFC**) – Ramesh Krishnamurti

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Founded – 1952

Overview of Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel's 3-day Visit to India

Abdulla Khaleel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives made an Official visit to India from **2nd January to 4th January 2025** with an aim to strengthen bilateral ties in several key areas including maritime security, trade and investment.

- This marks his **first** official visit to India and is the first diplomatic visitor to India in 2025.
- The visit featured high-level talks and the signing of key agreements aimed at enhancing bilateral relations.

Note: In October 2024, the President of the Republic of Maldives, **Mohamed Muizzu** visited India.

Highlights of the visit:

On January 03 2025, Dr. Abdulla Khaleel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives, held bilateral talks with Union Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, Ministry of External Affairs(MEA), in New Delhi, Delhi.

- Both Ministers acknowledged the economic partnership and the progress of ongoing projects facilitated through Indian grant assistance and line of credit initiatives.
- India and the Maldives have finalised a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border trade, marking a significant development in bilateral economic cooperation.

India & Maldives signed MoU for HICDP:

India and Maldives have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) for the execution of the **3rd** phase of **High Impact Community Development Projects** (HICDP) in Maldives.

- The Indian government will provide grant assistance for the implementation of the HICDP.

Key Points:

i. India and Maldives have signed an MoU in March **2019** regarding grant assistance of Maldivian Rufiyaa (**MVR**) **85 million** for implementation of the HICDPs through local bodies.

- It was revised in July 2021 to increase the grant assistance to MVR 155 million.

ii.In January **2023**, an agreement was made to provide additional grant assistance of **MVR 100 million** for the HICDPs.

iii.The projects carried out under the HICDP Scheme included handing over of two **sea ambulances** to the Defence Ministry of Maldives and **three** eco-tourism zones, developed under HICDPs scheme, in Addu City.

iv.Furthermore, the two countries exchanged **10 MoUs** under the 2nd phase of HICDP in June 2023 and **nine MoUs** in July 2023 respectively.

v.According to the Ministry of External Affairs, a total of **47** HICDPs have been taken up, out of which **8** have been completed and inaugurated.

About Maldives:

President– Mohamed Muizzu

Capital– Malé

Currency– Maldivian Rufiyaa(MVR)

MoT extended Deadlines for Compliance with Medical Textile QCO until April 1, 2025

On January 2 2025, the Ministry of Textiles(MoT) extended the compliance deadline of the **Medical Textiles (Quality Control Order, QCO), 2024** until **April 1, 2025** to address the challenges faced by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).While Large and Medium Enterprises(LME) must adhere to the earlier timeline of January 1, 2025.

- This extension and transition period aims to support the industry in meeting the new quality and ensures safer products, boosts consumer confidence, and enhances the efficacy of critical healthcare items.

i.Manufacturers and importers are also granted a 6-month period, ending on June 30, 2025, to clear existing legacy stock & to facilitate a smooth transition,

ii.The QCO applies to products like sanitary napkins, baby diapers and reusable sanitary pads/period panties, which are listed under Schedule A of the order.

iii.The order establishes stringent quality standards, including testing protocols and labeling requirements for key products.

AICTE Launches NEAT 4.0 Online Learning

On January 2025, the All India Council for Technical Education (**AICTE**) launched Phase 4 of the National Educational Alliance for Technology (**NEAT 4.0**) at the AICTE Headquarters in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi (Delhi).

- The event was graced by Professor **T.G. Sitharam**, Chairman of AICTE, Professor **Anil D. Sahasrabudhe**, Chairman of National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), **Buddha Chandrasekhor**, Chief Coordinating Officer (CCO) of NEAT, AICTE, and representatives from various EdTech companies.

i.The launch event, which included a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony, where **22 EdTech companies** signed MoUs with AICTE for **40 innovative products**.

- The companies that signed the MoU with AICTE for NEAT 4.0 include Amyppo Technologies Private Limited, Ansys Software, Culturelligence Private Limited, and others.
- The products underwent a thorough evaluation process consisting of four rounds, with more than 300 evaluations by domain expert assessments to ensure to met stringent quality standards before being added to the NEAT portal.

ii.NEAT 4.0, through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, brings advanced EdTech solutions within reach of students. The addition of emerging fields like Biomedical Engineering, Health & Wellness, and Space Technology showcases the portal's adaptability.

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI Lifts Business Restrictions on Arohan Financial Services Limited

On January 3 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) removed business restrictions imposed on Kolkata (West Bengal)-based microfinance institution **Arohan Financial Services Limited** following remedial measures initiated by the lender and its commitment to adhere to fair loan pricing.

- On October 17 2024, the regulator directed 4 non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) to cease and desist from sanctioning and disbursing loans, effective from the close of business on **October 21, 2024**.

i.The RBI had found that Arohan Financial Services, along with other NBFCs, were charging exorbitant interest rates and not following guidelines for assessing household income and considering repayment obligations for microfinance loans.

ii.While the restrictions on Arohan have been removed, those on Asirvad Micro Finance Limited (**AMFL**)(a subsidiary of Manappuram Finance Limited) and DMI Finance Private Limited (**DFPL**) remain in place.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Nomura forecasts India's GDP down to 6% in FY25

On January 03 2025, Japan brokerage **Nomura** forecasted that India's economy will grow more slowly in the coming years. The agency's revised prediction indicates that India's Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) growth will decelerate to **6%** in the Financial Year 2024-25 (**FY25**), a significant drop from **8.2%** in the FY24. In **FY26**, the GDP growth is expected to be around **5.9%**.

- Previously, the growth projections were set at **6.7%** for FY25 and **6.8%** for FY26.
- This is primarily attributed to various macroeconomic indicators signaling an overall slowdown.

Key Points:

i.Inflation: The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation is expected to ease to **4.9%** in FY25, down from **5.4%** in FY24, and will go even lower to **4.3%** in FY26.

ii.Sector-wise Growth: For FY25, the agency has predicted weaker growth in high-demand categories, such as cars and paints, while categories like two-wheelers (2Ws) and staples are expected to see stronger growth.

- In FY26, most consumer categories are expected to continue growing below the long-term trend, with premium segments gaining market share.

iii.Investment Outlook: Due to slow demand and increasing competition, **margin risks** are likely to rise, making it crucial for investors to be highly selective in FY26.

- The agency highlighted that most companies could pass on commodity costs post-COVID until 2025 due to high demand for their products.

SBI Report: Rural Poverty Ratio Drops Below 5% for the 1st time in FY24

According to the State Bank of India (SBI)'s [Research report](#) released on January 03 2025, **rural poverty ratio** dropped below 5% for the 1st time to **4.86%** in Financial Year 2023-24 (FY24) from 7.2% in FY23 and 25.7% in 2011-12.

- This reduction in poverty ratio in rural areas of the country is mainly driven by higher consumption growth among the bottom 0-5% fractile, supported by Government of India (GoI) led initiatives.
- The **urban poverty ratio** decreased marginally to **4.09%** in FY24 from 4.6% in FY23 and 13.7% in 2011-12.
- The report estimates that national poverty rates are now between 4-4.5%, marking a significant improvement in living conditions across the country.

Note: The report has used the data of the latest annual Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) for August 2023-July 2024 released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) in December 2024.

Key Findings:

i. The report highlighted that decrease in rural poverty ratio further led to shift in poverty line from 5-10% decile (in FY23) to 0-5% decile (in FY24).

ii. The report has estimated the poverty lines at **Rs 1,623** for rural areas and **Rs 1,944** for urban areas in FY24 by adjusting for decadal inflation and the imputation factor in the poverty line set by the Suresh Tendulkar Committee in 2011.

iii. The consumption inequality has decreased from 0.266 and 0.314 (in FY23) to 0.237 and 0.284, respectively in rural and urban areas of the country.

iv. The report showed that overall, the poverty rate in India is in the range of 4-4.5%, with almost negligible existence of extreme poverty.

v. The report revealed that the difference between rural and urban Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) to rural MPCE has decreased significantly from 88.2% (in 2009-10) and 71.2% (in FY23) to **69.7%** (in FY24).

- This decrease is mainly attributed to GoI led initiatives like Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), investments in rural infrastructure, increasing farmer's income and improving the rural livelihood significantly.

v. As per the report, most of the high-income Indian states show a savings rate greater than the national average of 31%.

- The report also showed that states like: Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar have low saving rates due to higher outward migration.

IRFC Signs MoU with REMCL to Finance RE Projects for Indian Railways

On January 03 2025, the Indian Railway Finance Corporation Limited(**IRFC**) has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with Railway Energy Management Company Limited (**REMCL**),a Joint Venture(JV) of the Ministry of Railways (MoR) and Rail India Technical and Economic Service(RITES), to support the financing of Renewable Energy (**RE**) **projects** developed by REMCL to supply power to Indian Railways(IR).

- The MoU establishes a framework for collaboration between IRFC and REMCL to support IR in reducing dependence on fossil fuels and achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030

i.The collaboration also includes exploring funding opportunities for thermal, nuclear, and renewable energy projects set up under a captive model through JV between IR and other partners.

ii.Under the MoU, REMCL will help IR by sourcing affordable conventional and renewable power and managing bidding for RE projects, while IRFC will handle project evaluation and fundraising.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

ACC Appoints Faiz Ahmed Kidwai as DG of DGCA

On January 03 2025, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (**ACC**) appointed **Faiz Ahmed Kidwai**, a 1996-batch Indian Administrative Service(IAS) officer of Madhya Pradesh(MP) Cadre, as the Director General (**DG**)of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (**DGCA**), under Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), as part of senior level bureaucratic reshuffle.

i.Ashutosh Agnihotri, a 1999-batch IAS officer from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, has been appointed as the chairman and Managing Director (MD) of New Delhi(Delhi) based Food Corporation of India (FCI).

ii.Akash Tripathi, a 1998-batch IAS officer of the MP cadre has been appointed as the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Power(MoP).

iii.Kamal Kishore Soan, a 1998-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre has been appointed as the Additional Secretary & Mission Director of Jal Jeevan Mission(JJM) under the Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS).

On January 03 2025, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (**ACC**) appointed **Faiz Ahmed Kidwai**, a 1996-batch Indian Administrative Service(IAS) officer of Madhya Pradesh(MP) Cadre, as the Director General (**DG**)of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (**DGCA**), under Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), as part of senior level bureaucratic reshuffle.

- He succeeds **Vikram Dev Dutt**, a 1993-batch IAS officer, who was appointed as the Secretary in the Ministry of Coal (MoC) in October 2024. Since then Dinesh Chand Sharma, Joint DG of DGCA, has held the additional charge.

i.He currently serves as the Additional Secretary in the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW).

ii.He has been appointed as the DG of DGCA with the rank and pay of Additional Secretary to the Government of India (GoI), temporarily setting aside the Recruitment Rules for the position, according to the order issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions (MoPP&P).

Other Appointments:

Ashutosh Agnihotri as Chairman and MD of FCI:

Ashutosh Agnihotri, a 1999-batch IAS officer from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, has been appointed as the chairman and Managing Director (MD) of New Delhi(Delhi) based Food Corporation of India (FCI).

- He currently serves as an Additional Secretary in the Department of Home(DH), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Akash Tripathi as Additional Secretary of MoP:

Akash Tripathi, a 1998-batch IAS officer of the MP cadre has been appointed as the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Power(MoP).

- He currently serves as the Chief Executive Officer(CEO) of MyGov, under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY)

Kamal Kishore Soan as Additional Secretary & Mission Director of Jal Jeevan Mission:

Kamal Kishore Soan, a 1998-batch IAS officer of the Jharkhand cadre has been appointed as the Additional Secretary & Mission Director of Jal Jeevan Mission(JJM) under the Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS).

- He currently serves as Additional Secretary in Labour welfare, under the Ministry of Labour & Employment(MoL&E).

About Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM):

The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) was launched by Prime Minister(PM) Narendra Modi on August 15, 2019, with the ambitious goal of providing tap water supply to every rural household by 2024.

- Under JJM, the fund sharing pattern between Centre and States/ UTs (Central share :State share) is 100:00 for UTs without legislature, 90:10 for North-Eastern & Himalayan States and UTs with legislature, and 50:50 for the rest of the States.

Shubha Thakur as Additional Secretary of Inter-State Council Secretariat of MHA:

Shubha Thakur, a 1989-batch Central Secretariat Service(CSS) Officer, has been appointed as the Additional Secretary at the Inter-State Council Secretariat, MHA.

- He currently serves as the Additional Secretary in the Department of Agriculture(DoA) under the MoA&FW.

Vinay Kumar as Additional Secretary of MoRTH:

ACC approved the in-situ upgrade of the post held by **Vinay Kumar**, 1999 batch IAS officer of Bihar cadre, as the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH).

- He currently serves as the Joint Secretary of MoRTH.

About the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA):

The DGCA is a statutory body of the Government of India (GoI) to regulate civil aviation in India. It became a statutory body under the Aircraft (Amendment) Act, 2020.

Directorate General(DG) – **Faiz Ahmed Kidwai**

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Founded – 1946

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

RBI Approves Merger of National Co-operative Bank with Cosmos Co-operative Bank

On January 03 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) approved the merger of National Co-operative Bank Limited, Bengaluru (Karnataka) with **Cosmos Co-operative Bank Limited**, Pune (Maharashtra), effective from January 6, 2025.

i.The RBI sanctioned the Scheme of Amalgamation of the banks in exercise of the powers conferred under Sub-Section(4) of Section 44A with Section 56 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

ii.The RBI granted approval to Housing Development Finance Corporation(**HDFC**) Bank Limited to acquire up to a **9.5%** stake in AU Small Finance Bank Limited, Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited(KMBL), and Capital Small Finance Bank Limited.

- The approval is valid until 1-year period, expiring on **January 2, 2026**.

About AU Small Finance Bank:

Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Sanjay Agarwal

Headquarters- Jaipur, Rajasthan

Established-1996

Tagline- Chalo Aage Badhe

On January 03 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) approved the merger of National Co-operative Bank Limited, Bengaluru (Karnataka) with **Cosmos Co-operative Bank Limited**, Pune (Maharashtra), effective from January 6, 2025.

- The RBI sanctioned the Scheme of Amalgamation of the banks in exercise of the powers conferred under Sub-Section(4) of Section 44A with Section 56 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

Key Points:

i.With this merger, all branches of the National Co-operative Bank, which include 12 in Bengaluru (Karnataka) and 1 in Mysore (Karnataka), will now operate as branches of Cosmos Co-operative Bank.

- In the Financial Year 2023-24(FY24), the Cosmos Bank had already merged with two Mumbai (Maharashtra) based banks, **Maratha Sahakari Bank Limited** (7 branches) & **Sahebrao Deshmukh Sahakari Bank Limited** (11 branches).

ii.In July 2023, RBI imposed certain restrictions on the National Co-operative Bank, limiting deposit withdrawals to Rs 50,000 per account & these restrictions were extended until **January 24, 2025.**

RBI Grants Approval to HDFC Bank for 9.5% stake Acquisition in AU Small Finance Bank

The RBI granted approval to Housing Development Finance Corporation(**HDFC**) Bank Limited to acquire up to a **9.5%** stake in AU Small Finance Bank Limited, Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited(KMBL), and Capital Small Finance Bank Limited.

- The approval is valid until 1-year period, expiring on **January 2, 2026.**

i.This approval extends to HDFC Bank's group companies, including HDFC Mutual Fund (MF), HDFC Life Insurance, HDFC ERGO General Insurance, HDFC Securities and HDFC Pension Management.

ii.HDFC Bank is allowed to purchase up to **9.5 % of the paid-up share** capital or voting rights in AU Small Finance Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, and Capital Small Finance Bank to ensure its group entities' aggregate holdings do not exceed the limit set by the RBI.

iii.The RBI Directions 2023 specify that "**aggregate holding**" includes shares owned by the bank, its affiliates, trustees, Mutual Funds(MFs), and promoter group entities.

About AU Small Finance Bank:

Managing Director **(MD)** & Chief Executive Officer **(CEO)**– Sanjay Agarwal

Headquarters- Jaipur, Rajasthan

Established-1996

Tagline- Chalo Aage Badhe

About Cosmos Co-operative Bank Limited:

Managing Director **(MD)**– Apekshita Thipsay

Headquarters- Pune, Maharashtra

Established-1906

Tagline- Say I'M banking and mean it!

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

NASA Unveiled New Mars Design "Mars Chopper" Successor of Ingenuity Helicopter

In January 2025, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (**NASA**) has unveiled the design of new mars drone named "**Mars Chopper**" for advanced exploration of planet Mars.

- It is a successor of the '**Ingenuity helicopter**' that roamed over the surface of Mars for over 3 years after landing on its surface alongside the Perseverance Rover in 2020.

Note:

i.Ingenuity Helicopter, a small helicopter which weighs 1.8 kilogram (kg).

ii.It was initially designed to perform up to 5 experimental test flights over 30 days but operated for almost 3 years performing 72 flights and flying 30 times farther than planned.

About Mars Chopper:

i.It is produced by the Southern California (the United States of America, USA)-based Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in partnership with the California-based Ames Research Center(ARC).

ii.It is a drone-like vehicle that is about the size of an Support Utility Vehicle (**SUV**) with 6 rotors. Each rotor has 6 blades, which are smaller in size compared to blades of Ingenuity but allows for increased lift.

iii.It is bulkier than its predecessor and has more payload capacity to carry scientific instruments such as imaging and analysis kits.

iv.It can carry maximum 5 kg of equipment and enables one to perform more complex tasks and can fly longer distances which is up to 3 kilometers(kms).

About National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA):

Administrator– Bill Nelson

Headquarters– Washington DC, the United States of America(USA)

Established– 1958

Vandana Agrawal Launches 2 FPVs GSL YARD – Amulya & Akshay for ICG

On January 5 2025, **Vandana Agrawal**, Chairperson, International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) Committee on Ship Acquisition, Financing and Leasing, launched 2 Fast Patrol Vessels (**FPVs**) built by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) YARD – **Amulya (1272)** and **Akshay (1273)** for the Indian Coast Guard (**ICG**) in Vasco da Gama, Goa.

- The event marked a significant milestone in GSL's growth, reflecting its commitment to technological and operational excellence.
- The 2 FPVs are indigenously designed and constructed by GSL, in line with the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

Background:

i.In 2022, the Ministry of Defence(MoD) has signed a contract with GSL for the construction of 8 FPVs for the ICG for Rs 473 crore.

ii.In October 2024, GSL launched two vessels of the same series 'Amulya' and 'Akshay'.

Key Features:

i.These vessels are specifically tailored to meet the **ICG's** operational needs, including surveillance and protection of offshore assets and island territories.

- **Key specifications:** Length: 52 meters (m), Breadth: 8 meters (m) and Displacement: 320 tonnes (t)

ii.The FPVs are equipped to perform high-speed patrolling and surveillance missions, contributing to the Indian Coast Guard's enhanced operational capabilities.

iii.For the 1st time in its history, GSL used its 'State-of-the-Art Ship-Lift System' to launch 2 vessels of the same series in October 2024 simultaneously, highlighting the shipyard's advanced infrastructure and modernization efforts.

About Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL):

Chairman & Managing Director (**CMD**) – Brajesh Kumar Upadhyay

Headquarters- Goa

Established-1957

SPORTS

KKFI Unveils Trophies and Mascots for the 1st ever Kho Kho World Cup 2025

On January 03 2024, the Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI) unveiled the trophies and mascots for the **1st-ever** Kho Kho World Cup scheduled from January 13-19, 2025. This event, supported by the Sports Authority of India (SAI), will be held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, New Delhi (Delhi).

- The tournament will feature 21 men's and 20 women's teams from 24 countries across 6 continents, showcasing global talent.

i.The mascots, '**Tejas**' and '**Tara**', are dynamic gazelles that represent the spirit of the tournament.

- **Tejas**, symbolising brilliance and energy, and **Tara**, representing guidance and aspiration, were depicted in vibrant blue and orange sporting attire adorned with traditional Indian motifs.

ii.The tournament will feature 2 magnificent trophies, a **blue trophy** for the men's championship and a **green trophy** for the women's championship.

- The blue trophy symbolizes trust, determination, and universal appeal, while the green trophy represents growth and vitality.

World Day of War Orphans is observed annually on **January 6** across the globe to raise awareness about the challenges faced by children who have been left orphaned by wars and about the trauma experienced by war orphans globally.

- The Day addresses social, psychological & physical obstacles confronted by war orphans, protects their rights and well-being and highlights the need for global attention and support.
- The World Day of War Orphans was proposed by the French organization SOS (Societas Socialis) Enfants en Détresse (**SOS Children in Distress**), to protect children from abuse and mistreatment.

About United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF):

Executive Director(**ED**)- Catherine M Russell

Headquarters- New York, United States of America (**USA**)

Established-December 11, 1946

Member Countries- 190

World Day of War Orphans is observed annually on **January 6** across the globe to raise awareness about the challenges faced by children who have been left orphaned by wars and about the trauma experienced by war orphans globally.

- The Day addresses social, psychological and physical obstacles confronted by war orphans, protects their rights and well-being and highlights the need for global attention and support.

Note:

- A **war orphan** is a child or children whose parents died while serving in military duty.
- The United Nations Children’s Fund (**UNICEF**) defines an orphan as any child **under 18 years** who lost one or both parents to any cause of death.

Objectives:

- **Raising Awareness:** Educating society about war orphans' struggles.
- **Mobilizing Resources:** Securing support for education, healthcare, and rehabilitation.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Promoting policies to protect war orphans' rights.

Background:

i. The World Day of War Orphans was proposed by the French organization SOS (Societas Socialis) Enfants en Détresse (**SOS Children in Distress**), to protect children from abuse and mistreatment.

ii. In Anno Domini (AD) 400, the Romans established the **1st orphanages** to support widows and orphans of soldiers who died in battle, offering aid until the age of 18.

- In 1741, The Foundling Hospital, London United Kingdom (UK) became the **1st charity** orphanage.

Violations against children:

In 2005, the United Nations (UN's) Security Council identified and condemned **6 grave violations** against children in times of war.

- Killing and maiming of children
- Recruitment or use of children in armed forces and armed groups
- Attacks on schools or hospitals
- Rape or other grave sexual violence
- Abduction of children
- Denial of humanitarian access for children.

Significance:

i.Over **473 million** children more than 1 in 6 globally live in areas affected by conflict, the highest number since World War II.

- The percentage of children living in conflict zones has doubled from **10%** in the 1990s to almost 19% today.

ii.By the end of 2023, **47.2 million** children had been displaced due to violence, with additional displacements expected in 2024 (e.g., in Haiti, Lebanon, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan).

iii.In 2023, **32,990 grave violations** against children were verified, the highest number ever recorded.

- Haiti,Caribbean saw a 1,000% increase in sexual violence against children in 2024.

iv.Over **52 million** children in conflict areas are out of school or repurposed in places like Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, and Syria.

Other Global Observance:

'World Orphans Day' was observed annually worldwide on **April 20**, declared by Worldwide Organisation for Charity (**WOC**) to raise awareness and inspire support for orphans worldwide.

Indian Constitutional Provisions:

Article 21, Article 21(a), Article 29(2), Articles 23 and 24, Article 39(e), Article 39(f) of the Indian Constitution contain provisions pertaining to the protection of orphans and orphanages.

- Article 39(f) of the Indian Constitution empowers the state to enact laws protecting children from exploitation and abandonment.

About United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

Executive Director(**ED**)- Catherine M Russell

Headquarters- New York, United States of America (**USA**)

Established-December 11, 1946

Member Countries- 190

8th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

PM Narendra Modi inaugurates & lays foundation stone for railway projects in J&K, Telangana & Odisha

On January 06 2025, Prime Minister **(PM)** Narendra Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for various railway projects including **Jammu Railway Division**, Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), **Rayagada Railway Division** Building of East Coast Railway, Odisha & **Charlapalli New Terminal Station**, Telangana via video conferencing in New Delhi (Delhi).

- These projects aim to create employment opportunities, infrastructure development, promote tourism and lead to overall socio-economic development of the region.

i. PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the new Jammu Railway Division spanning a total length of **742.1** kilometers(km).

ii. PM Narendra Modi also inaugurated the **Charlapalli New Terminal Station** in the Medchal-Malkajgiri District of Telangana ,a new coaching terminal along with provision of second entry with a cost of around **Rs 413 crore**.

iii. PM Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the **Rayagada Railway Division Building** under the East Coast Railway, Odisha, valued at **Rs 107 crore**.

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- These projects aim to create employment opportunities, infrastructure development, promote tourism and lead to overall socio-economic development of the region

Key Dignitaries:

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, Ministry of Railways (MoR); Union Minister of State (MoS) G Kishan Reddy, Ministry of Science & Technology (MoS&T), Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES); Union MoS Dr. Jitendra Singh, (MoES), MoS&T, Prime Minister's Office (PMO); Union MoS V. Somanna, MoR, Union MoS Ravneet Singh Bittu, MoR; Union MoS Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA); Governor of Odisha Hari Babu Kambhampati; Governor of Telangana Jishnu Dev Varma; Lieutenant Governor of J&K, Manoj Sinha; Chief Minister (CM) of J&K Omar Abdullah; CM of Telangana A Revanth Reddy and CM of Odisha Mohan Charan Majhi were present among other dignitaries at the event.

Jammu Railway Division:

i. PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the new Jammu Railway Division spanning a total length of **742.1** kilometers(km).

ii. The division includes:

- Pathankot-Jammu-Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla section (USBRL) (423 route km)
- Bhogpur-Sirwal-Pathankot section (87.21 route km)
- Batala (excluding)-Pathankot section (68.17 route km)
- Pathankot-Joginder Nagar narrow gauge section (163.72 route km)

iii. The USBRL is a milestone in India's engineering, technological and infrastructural strength.

- It involves the construction of 38 tunnels spanning a total length of 119 km, including India's longest transportation tunnels, the Sumber-Arpinchala T49 (12.75 km) and the Pir Panjal T-80 (11.2 km).
- Additionally, the project features 931 bridges with a combined length of 13 km, including the world's highest railway bridge, the **Chenab Bridge**, and India's first cable-stayed rail bridge, the **Anji Bridge**.

iv. This project, worth **Rs.11,000 crores**, is part of India's 'Made in India' initiative aims to improve connectivity, create jobs, boost tourism, and drive socio-economic development.

Note: As of December 2024, the Indian Railways (IR) operates **17 zones** with 68 divisions across India. With the creation of this division, the IR will have **70 divisions**.

Charlapalli Terminal Station :

i.PM Narendra Modi also inaugurated the **Charlapalli New Terminal Station** in the Medchal-Malkajgiri District of Telangana ,a new coaching terminal along with provision of second entry with a cost of around **Rs 413 crore**.

iii.With this new terminal, Cherlapalli will handle an additional 15 pairs of train services. .It will serve to ease the growing demand for rail transport in the Hyderabad–Secunderabad twin city region.

iii.The station now has 4 new high-level platforms, and the existing 5 platforms have been extended to accommodate full-length trains.

- Additionally, the station has 10 more lines, bringing the total capacity to 19 lines.

Rayagada Railway Division Building in Odisha:

i.PM Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the **Rayagada Railway Division Building** under the East Coast Railway, Odisha, valued at **Rs 107 crore**.

ii.This state-of-the-art facility will serve as the division's new headquarters, offering modern amenities such as a Divisional Control Office, a G+2 Digital Rights Management (DRM) Office Building with **12,000** square metres (sqm) of space, and dedicated housing for officers and staff.

iii.The new headquarters will streamline railway operations across Odisha, Andhra Pradesh (AP), and surrounding regions.

Points to Note:

- i.**The inauguration of the 'Namo Bharat' train in Delhi-NCR (National Capital Region) along with the launch of Delhi Metro project in January 2025, India has been expediting its initiatives in connectivity, with its metro rail network expanding to over **1,000 km** across 11 states and 23 cities.
- Now India has the **third-largest metro network** in the world after China and the United States of America(USA).
- ii.**In 1984, the first metro line in India, covering 3.4 km between Esplanade and Bhowanipur, opened in Kolkata, West Bengal(WB).
- iii.**Kochi(Kerala) became the first city in India to launch a Water Metro Project, connecting 10 islands around the city with electric hybrid boats. This initiative ensures seamless connectivity, with the first boat launched in December 2021.
- iv.**In 2020, India launched its first-ever driverless metro service on Delhi Metro's Magenta Line, setting a new benchmark for automation in public transport.
- v.**In 2024, India's first under-water metro tunnel was inaugurated in Kolkata, where the Esplanade-Howrah Maidan section passes beneath the Hooghly River.

MoE Released UDISE+ Report for 2023-24 on School Education; School Enrolment Dropped by Over 1 Crore Compared to 2018-19 Level

In January 2025, the Ministry of Education (**MoE**) released a comprehensive report on the 'Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2023-24' on school education in India. As per the report, school enrollment of students in India decreased from 25.17 crore (in 2022-23) **to 24.8 crore (in 2023-24)**, a drop of nearly 1.22 crore students (6%) as compared to 2018-19.

- The report further revealed that enrollment in schools across the country remained above 26 crore from 2018-19 to 2021-2022, showing consistent increase annually except COVID year of 2020-21.

i.As per the report, total number of boys enrolled in school has decreased by 4.87%, from 13.53 crore (in 2018-19) **to 12.87 crore** (in 2023-24).

- Similarly, the total number of girls enrolled in school has declined by 4.48%, from 12.49 crore (in 2018-19) to 11.93 crore (in 2023-24).

ii.The UDISE+ report showed that the number of single-teacher schools in the country has decreased by 7219, from 1,18,190 (in 2022-23) to **1,10,971 (in 2023-24)**.

- Among the States, Madhya Pradesh (MP) (13,198), recorded the highest number of schools with single teachers, followed by Andhra Pradesh (AP) (12,611).

About Ministry of Education (MoE):

Union Minister- Dharmendra Pradhan (Lok Sabha Constituency- Sambalpur, Odisha)

Minister of State (MoS)- Jayant Chaudhary (Rajya Sabha- Uttar Pradesh, UP); Dr.

Sukanta Majumdar (Constituency- Balurghat, West Bengal, WB)

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- The report further revealed that enrollment in schools across the country remained above 26 crore from 2018-19 to 2021-2022, showing consistent increase annually except COVID year of 2020-21.

About UDISE+:

i.Initially, Government of India (GoI) launched UDISE in **2012-13** by integrating Information Management Systems(IMS) in place separately for elementary education and secondary education.

- It was then being managed by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration(NIEPA), New Delhi(Delhi).

ii.Later in 2018-19, the Department of School Education and Literacy (**DoSE&L**) under MoE, introduced UDISE+, which is one of the largest management information systems.

- It has covered over **14.72 lakhs of schools**, 98.08 lakhs of teachers and 24.08 crores of children in India.

iii.The UDISE+ provides online uploading of data at school level with inbuilt validation checks and subsequent data verification at the block, district and state level ensures data reliability and timely competition.

iv.The latest edition of UDISE+ report has captured data on **over 60 fields** for each student and to maintain the uniqueness of the child the Aadhaar details were also collected on voluntary basis.

- It further revealed that over 19.7 crore students provided Aadhaar numbers by 2023-24 voluntarily.
- Other than Aadhar card, a separate unique Educational ID (EID) for every student has been created in the UDISE+ portal.

Key Findings:

i.As per the report, total number of **boys** enrolled in school has decreased by 4.87%, from 13.53 crore (in 2018-19) to **12.87 crore** (in 2023-24).

- Similarly, the total number of **girls** enrolled in school has declined by 4.48%, from 12.49 crore (in 2018-19) to **11.93 crore** (in 2023-24).

ii.**Bihar**, witnessed the highest drop in enrollments, from over 2.49 crore students (in 2018-19) to 2.13 crore students (in 2023-24), followed by Uttar Pradesh (**UP**) decreased from 4.44 crore (in 2018-19) to 4.16 crore (in 2023-24) and **Maharashtra** decreased from over 2.32 crore (in 2018-19) to 2.13 crore (in 2023-24).

iii.The UDISE+ report showed that the number of single-teacher schools in the country has decreased by 7219, from 1,18,190 (in 2022-23) to **1,10,971 (in 2023-24)**.

- Among the States, Madhya Pradesh (MP) (13,198), recorded the highest number of schools with single teachers, followed by Andhra Pradesh (AP) (12,611).

iv.The report highlighted that enrollment in single-teacher schools has decreased from around 47.43 lakh students (in 2022-23) to 39.94 lakh (in 2023-24).

v.As per the report, the number of schools with zero enrollments has increased from 10,294 (in 2022-23) to 12,954 (in 2023-24).

- Among all Indian states, West Bengal (WB) has the largest number of schools with zero enrollments (3254), followed by Rajasthan (2167) and Telangana (2097).

vi.The report showed that female representation of school teachers has increased to 53.3% between 2018-19 and 2023-24, while male representation decreased to 46.6% during the same period.

vii.Minorities accounted for around 20% of total enrollment in 2023-24. Among the minorities, 79.6% were Muslims, followed by Christians (10%), Sikhs (6.9%), Buddhists (2.2%), Jains (1.3%) and Parsis (0.1%).

- Category-wise: Other Backward Class (OBC) accounted 45.2% of total students registered in UDISE at the national level, followed by General Category (26.9%), Scheduled Caste (SC) (18%) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) (9.9%),

About Ministry of Education (MoE):

Union Minister- Dharmendra Pradhan (Lok Sabha Constituency- Sambalpur, Odisha)

Minister of State (**MoS**)– Jayant Chaudhary (Rajya Sabha- Uttar Pradesh, UP); Dr.

Sukanta Majumdar (Constituency- Balurghat, West Bengal, WB)

Government launched PLI Scheme 1.1 for specialty steel to boost domestic production

Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries, **H. D. Kumaraswamy** launched the second round of **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for Specialty Steel**, termed as **PLI Scheme 1.1** on **6th January**, 2025 at the Vigyan Bhavan New Delhi.

- The scheme will work within the already allocated funds for the scheme, i.e., **Rs.6,322 crore** and will be implemented for the period of Financial Year (FY) **2025-26 to FY 2029-30**.

Key Highlights:

i.The **PLI Scheme 1.1** has been introduced for **5** product categories with respect to the existing PLI Scheme, namely Coated / Plated Steel Products, High Strength / Wear resistant Steel, Specialty Rails, Alloy Steel Products & Steel wires and Electrical Steel.

ii.In the **2nd** round of PLI Scheme, investment and capacity creation thresholds for Cold-Rolled Grain-Oriented (**CRGO**) steel has been reduced to **Rs.3,000 crore** and **50,000 tonnes** to promote participation in this category.

Ministry of Steel:

Union Minister– Haradanahalli Devegowda Kumaraswamy (Mandya, Karnataka)

Minister of State (MoS)– Bhupathi Raju Srinivasa Varma (Narasapuram, Andhra Pradesh)

Union Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries, **Haradanahalli Devegowda Kumaraswamy** launched the second round of **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for Specialty Steel**, termed as **PLI Scheme 1.1** on **6th January**, 2025 at the Vigyan Bhavan New Delhi.

- PLI Scheme 1.1 applications will remain open from **6th January to 31st January 2025**.
- The scheme will work within the already allocated funds for the scheme, i.e., **Rs.6,322 crore** and will be implemented for the period of Financial Year (FY) **2025-26 to FY 2029-30**.

Key Highlights:

i.The **PLI Scheme 1.1** has been introduced for **5** product categories with respect to the existing PLI Scheme, namely Coated / Plated Steel Products, High Strength / Wear resistant Steel, Specialty Rails, Alloy Steel Products & Steel wires and Electrical Steel.

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iii.In the first round, there were **44** active projects by **26** companies with an investment of about **Rs.27,106 crore** and 24 million tons of downstream capacity creation.

- As of November 2024, the investment made by companies is **Rs 18,300 crore** till now.

About PLI Scheme:

i.The PLI Scheme was launched in **March 2020** with an aim to boost India's manufacturing capabilities, reduce reliance on imports and promotion of exports by offering financial incentives directly related to measurable outcomes such as higher production and incremental sales.

ii.It was initially launched to target **three** industries –

- Mobile manufacturing and electric components,
- Pharmaceutical (critical key starting materials/active pharmaceutical ingredients),
- Medical device manufacturing

iii.Later it was extended to a total of **14** sectors with a total budgetary outlay of **Rs.1.97 trillion**.

iv.The **14** sectors include-

- Mobile Manufacturing and Specified Electronic Components
- Critical Key Starting Materials/Drug Intermediaries & Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients
- Manufacturing of Medical Devices
- Automobiles and Auto Components,
- Pharmaceuticals Drugs
- Specialty Steel
- Telecom & Networking Products,
- Electronic/Technology Products,
- White Goods (ACs and LEDs)
- Food Products
- Textile Products: MMF segment and technical textiles
- High efficiency solar PV modules
- Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery
- Drones and Drone Components

v. As of **August 2024**, investments worth **1.46 lakh crore** have been utilized leading to a boost in production and sales, amounting to **Rs.12.50 lakh crore**, and directly and indirectly generating approximately **9.5 lakh** jobs.

Ministry of Steel:

Union Minister- Haradanahalli Devegowda Kumaraswamy (Mandya, Karnataka)

Minister of State (MoS)- Bhupathi Raju Srinivasa Varma (Narasapuram, Andhra Pradesh)

MHA launches 'e-student visa' & 'e-student-x visa' for foreign students

On January 5 2025, the Ministry of Home Affairs (**MHA**) introduced two new specialized visa categories: the '**e-student visa**' and the '**e-student-x visa**', designed to facilitate foreign students pursuing higher education at Indian academic institutions.

- The e-student visa is available to eligible foreign students registered on the SII portal, while the e-student-x visa is designated for the dependents of e-student visa holders.
- All interested students are required to register on the Study in India (**SII**) **portal**, an initiative launched by the Ministry of Education (MoE), to streamline the admission process for international students seeking long-term or short-term courses in India.

About Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA):

Union Minister – Amit Shah (Constituency – Gandhinagar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (MoS) – Nityanand Rai (Constituency – Ujiarpur, Bihar); Bandi Sanjay Kumar (Constituency – Karimnagar, Telangana)

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About e-student visa :

i.Eligibility: The e-student visa is for foreign nationals enrolled in full-time Undergraduate (UG), Postgraduate (PG), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), or other formal programs at institutions recognized by India's regulatory bodies.

- Students can apply for the visa once they receive an admission offer from an SII partner institute.

ii.Duration:Valid for up to **five years** based on course duration, with extensions available in India.

- Visa holders may enter India via any authorized immigration checkpoint.

iii.Registration Process: Students must apply for a visa separately through the <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>. The authenticity of their application will be verified using their SII Identification(ID).

About the Study in India (SII) portal:

- i.**The Study in India (**SII**) portal was launched in **2018** to streamline the admission process for international students pursuing higher education in India.
- ii.**The platform connects students to over 600 partner institutes in India offering more than 8,000 courses across disciplines like engineering, management, agriculture, sciences, arts, humanities, commerce, law, paramedical sciences (pharmacy, nursing), and niche fields like Buddhist Studies and Yoga.
- iii.**Foreign students applying for the SII program can receive financial assistance through the Study in India Scholarship or a Fee Waiver.
 - The SII Scholarship, valued at **USD 3,200**, is awarded to students who excel in the PRAGATII Exam.

Note: According to Henley Passport Index 2024, India's passport ranked 83rd, providing its citizens with visa-free access to 58 countries.

About Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA):

Union Minister – Amit Shah (Constituency – Gandhinagar, Gujarat)

Minister of State(**MoS**) – Nityanand Rai (Constituency – Ujiarpur, Bihar); Bandi Sanjay Kumar (Constituency – Karimnagar, Telangana)

Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh chaired the “Northeast Region States Meet 2025” held in Guwahati, Assam

In January 2025, Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, and Dairying (**MoFAH&D**) and Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) chaired the 'Northeast Region States Meet 2025 held in Guwahati, Assam.

- The event was organised by the Department of Fisheries (DoF) under the **MoFAH&D** to review the implementation of Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY).

i. During the event, Union Minister distributed certificates to fisheries beneficiaries, including National Fisheries Digital Platform (NFDP) registration certificates, Kisan Credit Card (KCC) cards, awards for the best Fisheries-based Farmer Producer Organisations (FFPOs) and Fisheries Start-ups.

ii. He inaugurated and laid the foundation for 50 key projects worth Rs 50 crores under PMMSY covering all NER states except Arunachal Pradesh (AR) and Mizoram.

iii. He also launched India's first organic fisheries cluster in **Soreng district** of Sikkim, which will boost farmer incomes and promote sustainability in aquaculture.

About Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying (MoFAH&D):

Union Minister- Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh (Constituency- Munger, Bihar)

Minister of State (MoS) – S.P. Singh Baghel (Constituency- Agra, Uttar Pradesh, UP); George Kurian (Rajya Sabha- Madhya Pradesh, MP)

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Key People: Union Minister of State (MoS) George Kurian, MoFAH&D and Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA); Union MoS S.P. Singh Bhagel, MoFAH&D and MoPR; Dr. Abhilaksh Likhi, Secretary, Department of Fisheries(DoF) under MoFAH&D; Ministers in-charge of Fisheries from other Northeastern Region (NER) states along with several eminent dignitaries were present at the event.

Note: The inland fish production in the NER has increased from 4.03 lakh tonnes in 2014-15 to 6.41 lakh tonnes in 2023-24, registering an annual growth rate of 5%. Andhra Pradesh(AP) is the largest fish producer in the country followed by West Bengal(WB) and Gujarat.

Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh Inaugurated and Laid Foundation of Projects worth Rs 50 Crore:

Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh, MoFAH&D and MoPR inaugurated and laid the foundation for **50 key projects** worth **Rs 50 crores** under PMMSY covering all NER states except Arunachal Pradesh (**AR**) and **Mizoram**, during the 'Northeast Region States Meet 2025'.

- Out of total Rs 50 crores, the Government of India (GoI) will provide financial assistance of Rs **38.63 crore**.

Details of the Projects:

i. Out of these 50 key projects which will be developed under PMSSY, 24 will be implemented in Sikkim, followed by **Assam (12), Manipur(7), Tripura and Nagaland (3 each)** and **Meghalaya (1).**

i. An Integrated Aqua Park will be established in the Darang district of Assam, with a capacity to produce 150 tonnes of fish annually generating up to 2,000 job opportunities.

ii. A large fish feed plant will be set up in the Kamrup district, Assam with a capacity to produce 20,000 tonnes of feed annually and hatchery projects will be established in various districts with the objective of producing 50 million spawns annually.

iii. Ice plants and cold storage units will be established in Thoubal and Imphal districts of Manipur, to preserve fish produce and reduce post-harvest losses.

iv. The projects in Meghalaya will emphasize on promoting recreational fisheries in the East Khasi Hills district.

v. Three projects will be developed in Nagaland which include: the construction of freshwater finfish hatcheries in the Mokochung and Kiphire districts. These hatcheries are estimated to produce collectively 21 million fry annually.

vi. Ornamental Fish Rearing units and finfish hatcheries will be set up in Tripura.

vii. Sikkim will implement 24 projects which include the setting up of Recirculatory Aquaculture Systems (RAS) to give boost to the sustainable farming, the construction of fish kiosks in Gangtok and other towns of the state, and the development of ornamental fish rearing units.

India's first Organic Fisheries Cluster launched in Sikkim:

During the event, Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh also launched **India's first organic fisheries cluster**, under the PMMSY initiative in **Soreng district** of Sikkim, which will boost farmer incomes and promote sustainability in aquaculture.

- The cluster will incorporate ecological fish farming methods, avoiding harmful chemicals and promoting minimal environmental pollution.
- The project also aimed to sell antibiotic, chemical and pesticide free organic fish in eco-conscious markets across the world.

Key points:

- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) will be a key stakeholder in developing fisheries and aquaculture organic clusters in Sikkim.
- Apart from providing financial and technical assistance for the requisite fisheries infrastructure and capacity building, NABARD will also facilitate in the growth of the organic cluster by engaging fisher's cooperatives and formation of FFPOs in the state.

Note: So far, DoF had notified 4 fisheries related clusters in India: Pearl Cluster in Hazaribagh district (Jharkhand), Ornamental Fisheries Cluster in Madurai district (Tamil Nadu, TN), Seaweed Cluster in Union Territory (UT) of Lakshadweep and Tuna Cluster in Andaman & Nicobar.

About Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY):

i.The PMMSY was launched in September 2020 with an aim to double the income of fish farmers and fishers in the country.

- The initiative delves into the domain of inland fisheries and aquaculture, recognizing their pivotal role in bolstering production and ensuring robust food security.

ii.It is being implemented for a period of five years (2020-21 to 2024-25) with an investment of Rs 20,050 crore.

iii.It is an umbrella scheme with two separate Components namely Central Sector Scheme (CS) and Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS).

About Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying (MoFAH&D):

Union Minister- Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh (Constituency- Munger, Bihar)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – S.P. Singh Baghel (Constituency- Agra, Uttar Pradesh, UP); George Kurian (Rajya Sabha- Madhya Pradesh, MP)

FIU-IND Signs MoU with IRDAI for Enhanced Cooperation in Combating Money Laundering

On January 6, 2025, the Financial Intelligence Unit-India (**FIU-IND**) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (**IRDAI**) to foster mutual cooperation between FIU-IND and IRDAI in areas critical to Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) within the insurance sector

- This MoU is part of a broader strategy to implement the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (**PMLA**) and related rules effectively.

Note: IRDAI, is a statutory body formed under an Act of Parliament, **IRDA Act, 1999** for overall supervision and development of the Insurance sector in India.

Signatories: The MoU was signed by **Vivek Aggarwal**, Director, FIU-IND and **Satyajit Tripathy**, Member (Distribution), IRDAI in New Delhi (Delhi).

Key Areas of Focus:

i. Sharing of Intelligence: The MoU focuses on exchanging pertinent intelligence and information to ensure timely action on suspicious activities.

ii. Reporting Procedures: It will define clear guidelines for how regulated entities in the insurance sector report suspicious financial transactions under the PMLA rules.

iii. Training and Skill Development: Both organizations will organize training sessions to upskill personnel within the regulated insurance entities, focusing on the identification of risks and suspicious activities.

iv. Risk Assessments: Regular assessments will be conducted to understand the vulnerabilities in the insurance sector and enhance the compliance efforts related to AML/CFT obligations.

v. Appointments: The agreement also includes the appointment of a nodal officer and an alternate nodal officer by each party to the MoU.

About Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU IND):

FIU-IND is an organisation under the Department of Revenue (DoR), Ministry of Finance (MoF) which collects financial intelligence about offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002(PMLA).

Director- Vivek Aggarwal

Headquarters- New Delhi (Delhi)

Established-2004

CSIR-NPL Celebrates 79th Foundation Day: Advancing Metrology for National Development

On 4th January 2025, CSIR-National Physical Laboratory (**CSIR-NPL**) celebrated its **79th Foundation Day** in New Delhi (Delhi).

- CSIR-NPL is India's National Metrology Institute (NMI), entrusted with the development, maintenance, and dissemination of National Standards across industries, strategic sectors, and scientific research.

i. During the event CSIR-NPL signed Memorandums of Understanding (**MoU**) with **IITM** (Chennai, Tamil Nadu, TN) for academic and research collaboration and with CSIR- Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (**CIMAP**) for producing Bharatiya Nirdeśhak Dravya (BND) (Certified Reference Materials) in plant-based materials.

ii. During the event, CSIR-NPL introduced 2 new BNDs:

- Lanthanum Hexaboride Powder (**BND-2025**) for calibration standards in powder X-ray diffraction.
- White Portland Cement Standard (**BND-5064**), developed with the National Council for Cement and Building Materials (NCCBM).

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Indonesia Joins BRICS as 10th Full Member

On 6 January 2025, **Brazil**, serving as the BRICS chair for 2025, announced that **Indonesia**, world's fourth-most populous nation, has become a **10th full member** of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) alliance.

- The inclusion of Indonesia aligns with Brazil's **theme** for its presidency: "Enhancing Global South Cooperation for a More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance."

Background:

In 2024, BRICS countries agreed to admit Indonesia as a member. This decision followed the guidelines set during the 2023 BRICS meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa (SA).

- The expansion shows the group's focus on strengthening ties with emerging economies.

About BRICS:

BRIC was established as a formal group in 2006 with its original members: Brazil, Russia, India, and China, headquartered in **Shanghai, China**.

i.In 2009, the first BRIC Summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia.

ii.In 2010, the group evolved from BRIC to BRICS with the inclusion of **South Africa**.

iii.In 2024, BRICS expanded by adding four new members: **Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran** and the United Arab Emirates (**UAE**). With Indonesia's inclusion in 2025, the group now has **10 members**.

Points to Note:

i.The 16th BRICS Summit was held in Kazan, Russia, under Russia's chairmanship in 2024.

ii.The 17th BRICS Summit will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in July 2025.

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI retain the Interest rate of FRSB for January to June 2025

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank India (**RBI**) has announced the interest rate for RBI Floating Rate Savings Bonds (Taxable) **FRSB 2020 (T)** for the period of January 1 to June 30, 2025 will remain at **8.05%**, comprising the National Savings Certificate (NSC) rate of **7.70%** and an additional spread of **0.35%**.

- The interest rate on RBI FRSB is not fixed, adjusted semi-annually based on the interest rate of the NSC.

- i.** Interest earned on RBI FRSB is taxable, with no tax deductions allowed for the investment. Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) applies if annual interest exceeds Rs.10,000.
- ii.** The bonds require a minimum investment of **Rs.1,000** additional investments in multiples of Rs.1,000, and no upper limit. The bonds cannot be pledged as collateral for loans.
- iii.** The RBI FRSB has a **seven-year lock-in period** and does not allow early withdrawal, except for senior citizens.

- Seniors can withdraw early with a penalty after a minimum lock-in period include six years for aged 60–70, five years for aged 70–80, and four years for those aged over 80.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Overview of 82nd Golden Globes Awards 2025: Jacques Audiard's 'Emilia Perez' bagged 4 awards

The **82nd edition** of Golden Globes Award 2025 was held on **5th January, 2025** at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, California, United States of America (USA). The Golden Globes Awards are held annually and are presented by Hollywood Foreign Press Association (**HFPA**).

- The 2025 award recognizes excellence in film both American and International and American Television (TV) 2024.
- American comedian and actress **Nikki Glaser** made history at the 2025 award ceremony as the **1st woman** to solo-host the event.

Nominations of 82nd Golden Globes Award:

i.The nominations of the 82nd Golden Globes Awards under **27 categories** were announced by American comedian & actress, **Mindy Kaling** and American actor, **Morris Chestnut**.

ii.The event marked the **1st time**, the organization hosted a special ceremony for the recipients of its 2 historic honours of Golden Globes 2025: '**the Cecil B DeMille Award**' & '**the Carol Burnett Award**' .

iii.American actor & 3-time Golden Globes winner **Ted Danson** received the 1st ever '**Carol Burnett Award 2025**' for his role in Netflix's 'A Man on the Inside'.

iv.American actress & film producer **Viola Davis** was presented with the 'Cecil B. DeMille Award 2025' for her powerful performances in 'Fences' & 'The Woman King.'

v.The film '**All We Imagine As Light**' directed by Indian filmmaker **Payal Kapadia** featured in double nominations for the categories: Best Motion Picture (Non-English Language) and the Best Director (Motion Picture).

Highlights:

i.**Emilia Perez** (French musical crime comedy) led with 10 nominations, including Best Motion Picture (Musical or Comedy), Best Director (Jacques Audiard) & Best Actress (Karla Sofia Gascon).

- The film won **4 awards**, including Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress (Zoe Saldana), Best Non-English Feature, and Best Original Song.

ii.**The Brutalist** (A24 film) followed closely with 7 nominations & won **3 awards** including Best Actor (Adrien Brody), Best Director (Brady Corbet) and Best Movie (Drama).

iii.**Shogun** swept all **4 of its categories**, winning Best Series, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor & Best Supporting Actress.

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iii. On the television front, The Bear (FX) led with 5 nominations. Shogun (FX) & Only Murders in the Building (Hulu) had 4 nominations each.

- Jeremy Allen White won Best Actor (Comedy or Musical) for The Bear.
- Jean Smart won Best Actress (Comedy or Musical).

iv. Shogun swept all **4 of its categories**, winning Best Series, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor & Best Supporting Actress.

Lists of Golden Globes Awards 2025:

Category	Winner
Best Motion Picture (Musical/ Comedy)	Emilia Perez (Jacques Audiard)
Best Motion Picture (Drama)	The Brutalist (Brady Corbet)
Best Actor in a Motion Picture (Drama)	Adrien Brody (The Brutalist)
Best Actress in a Motion Picture (Drama)	Fernanda Torres (I'm Still Here)
Best TV Series (Drama)	Shogun (Jonathan van Tulleken)
Best Actress in a TV Series (Drama)	Anna Sawai (Shogun)
Best TV Series (Musical/ Comedy)	Hacks (Jean Smart & Hannah Einbinder)
Best Limited Series/ Anthology Series	Baby Reindeer (Richard Gadd)
Best Cinematic and Box Office Achievement	Wicked (John M. Chu)
Best Original Song (Motion Picture)	Emilia Perez (El Mal song)
Best Original Score (Motion Picture)	Challengers (Luca Guadagnino)
Best Director (Motion Picture)	Brady Corbet (The Brutalist)
Best Motion Picture (Animated)	Flow (Sideshow / Janus Films)
Best Actor in a Musical/ Comedy	Sebastian Stan (A Different Man)

Best Actress in a Musical/ Comedy	Demi Moore (The Substance)
Best Actress in a Limited Series/Anthology Series	Jodie Foster (True Detective: Night Country)
Best Actor in a Limited Series/Anthology Series	Colin Farrell (The Penguin)
Best Motion Picture (Non-English Language)	Emilia Perez (Jacques Audiard)
Best Stand-Up Comedy Performance	Ali Wong (Ali Wong:Single Lady)
Best Screenplay (Motion Picture)	Conclave (Writer Peter Straughan)
Best Actor in a Musical/ Comedy Series	Jeremy Allen White (The Bear)
Best Supporting Actor (TV Series)	Tadanobu Asano (Shogun)
Best Supporting Actress (TV Series)	Jessica Gunning (Baby Reindeer)
Best Supporting Actor (Motion Picture)	Kieran Culkin (A Real Pain)
Best Supporting Actress (Motion Picture)	Zoe Saldana (Emilia Perez)
Best Actress in a Musical/ Comedy Series	Jean Smart (Hacks)
Best Actor in a Drama Series	Hiroiyuki Sanada (Shogun)

About Golden Globes Awards:

The Golden Globes Awards, referred to as 'Hollywood's Party of the Year', is the largest award show in the world celebrated to honor artists and professionals from both American TV's & films.

- The 1st Golden Globes Award was held on **January 20 1944.**

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

CCI Grants Automatic Approval to Avenue-Mavco Acquisition of MHM Holding GmbH

On January 04 2025, the Competition Commission of India (**CCI**) granted automatic approval to the **Avenue-Mavco** acquisition of Germany based 'MHM Holding Gesellschaft mit beschraenkter Haftung (**GmbH**)' under its Green Channel route. This fast-track approval mechanism indicates that the transaction does not pose significant competition concerns or overlaps in the Indian market.

- The target company, MHM Holding GmbH, is the parent company of Hubergroup, a global leader in printing inks and chemicals with significant presence in India and Europe.

i.Avenue India Emergence Private Limited (Avenue), part of the Avenue Capital Group, specializes in specialty lending and investments, with operations in markets across the United States (US), Europe, and Asia.

ii.Mavco Investments Private Limited (Mavco) is a privately held entity by individuals and trusts.

iii.The acquisition will involve Avenue and Mavco jointly acquiring **100% ownership** of MHM Holding. A joint venture will be established in India to manage the business and oversee the transaction rights locally.

iv.The approval streamlines the regulatory process for mergers and acquisitions, enabling faster clearance for deals that do not adversely impact competition in the market.

ENVIRONMENT

New Ant Species '**Tapinoma onaele**' discovered in Western Ghats

In January 2025, a team of researchers from Goa, Dehradun(Uttarakhand) and Karnataka discovered a new ant species named '**Tapinoma onaele**', in the Western Ghats, Kodagu district, Karnataka. This species, named after the Kannada term '**onaele**', meaning "dried leaves," reflects its natural habitat in the leaf litter of the forest floor.

i.This discovery follows previous notable finds, such as **Protanilla flamma** and **Probolomyrmex procne**, a species not seen in India for 3 decades.

- Goa is only the 3rd known location where it has been documented in India.

ii.Leaf litter, composed of fallen leaves and organic material, is vital for the ecosystem which provides shelter and nourishment for a range of organisms, including ants.

- These ants help with decomposition, soil movement, and pest control, playing an essential role in forest ecology.

OBITUARY

Former Greek Prime Minister Costas Simitis passed away

Former Greek Prime Minister (**PM**) **Costas Simitis**, a law professor and a reformist, has passed away at the age of 88 in Corinth, Greece. He was born on 23rd June 1936 in Piraeus, Greece.

- He served as the PM of Greece for eight years from 1996 to 2004.
- He was credited as the architect of Greece's joining the common European currency, the euro.

About Costas Simitis:

i.Costas Simitis was a notable Greek politician and academic, was a founding member of the Socialist Panhellenic Socialist Movement (**PASOK**) party.

ii.In 1996, he was elected as President of PASOK at the 4th Congress of the party, as former PM Andreas Papandreou passed away.

iii.He served as the leader of the PASOK from 1996 to 2004 and as Greece's PM during the same period.

iv.He lowered the public debt and budget deficit during his administration and paved the way for Greece to join the eurozone in 2001.

- He also helped Cyprus join the European Union(EU) in 2004.

Renowned Kannada Novelist and Writer Na D'Souza Passed Away at 87

On January 05 2025, Prominent Kannada Novelist and writer **Norbert D'Souza**, popularly known as Dr. Na D'Souza, passed away at the age of **87** in Mangalore, Karnataka. He was born in Sagar, Karnataka on June 6, 1937.

- He was known for his inspiring works on **social justice, human rights**, and human relationships and was one of those early Kannada writers who created awareness on environment and climate change.
- His stories reflected the struggles faced by the people of **Malnad region**.

About Norbert D'Souza:

i.Na D'Souza began his career as typist in Karnataka's Department of Public Works and worked for **37**

ii.He has written over **40** novels, various short stories, plays, and children's literature, totalling more than 94 published books.

iii.In 2014, he presided over the 80th Kannada Sahitya Sammelana held in Madikeri, Karnataka.

iv.Moreover, some of his works were also adapted into critically acclaimed films, including Kadina Benki, Dweepa, Baluvali, Antharya, and Bettada Puradaditta Makkalu.

Awards and Honors:

i. Na D'Souza has received various awards including **Karnataka Sahitya Academy Award** in 1993 for his work "MulugadeyaOorigeBandavaru" and the Karnataka Rajyotsava Award in 1998.

ii.He also won the Pampa award in 2024 by the Karnataka government.

STATE NEWS

Odisha CM Inaugurates Adivasi Mela 2025; Launches Shahid Madho Singh Scheme

On January 5 2025, Chief Minister (CM) of Odisha, **Mohan Charan Majhi**, inaugurated the **Adivasi Mela 2025**, ahead of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas(PBD) program, at the Exhibition Grounds in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

- He also launched the **Shahid Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme** with a budget of Rs 156 crore, during the event to support tribal students and honored nine tribal talents and ten tribal farmers for their outstanding contributions at the event.
- A special edition of the journal '**Banja-2025**', published by the Tribal Language and Culture Academy of Odisha, was also released during the event.

Note: The 18th PBD Convention is being organized in partnership with the State Government of Odisha from January 8 to 10, 2025 in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

About Adivasi Mela:

i.This annual fair, a celebration of Odisha's tribal heritage and culture, will be held from January 5 to January 15, 2025.

ii.This year's fair features 147 stalls showcasing tribal art, handicrafts, and food, 15 live demonstrations of traditional practices, and a dedicated Bhagwan Birsa Munda Pavilion.

About Shahid Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme:

The scheme is named after Shaheed Madho Singh, a freedom fighter and tribal landowner from the Ghansa area of Bargarh district, Odisha, who played a significant role in India's independence movement.

- This initiative aims to reduce dropout rates and increase students' interest in education.

Key Points:

i.Tribal students who pass Class 8 and join Class 9 or 10 will receive a one-time incentive of **Rs.5,000 per year.**

- Students enrolling in Class 11 will also be eligible for this benefit.

ii.The scheme has been implemented for the current academic year 2024-2025 and is exclusively available to Scheduled Tribe(ST) students whose annual family income does not exceed **Rs 2,50,000**

About Odisha:

Chief Minister (**CM**)– Mohan Charan Majhi

Governor– Hari Babu Kambhampati

Capital– Bhubaneswar

National Park (**NP**)-Similipal NP, Bhitarkanika NP

Telangana to celebrate Savitribai Phule's birth anniversary as 'Women Teacher's Day'

The **Telangana** government has decided to celebrate the birth anniversary of **Savitribai Phule** as a state function on **3rd January** as '**Women Teacher's Day**' every year to pay tribute to her contributions to women's education.

- Savitribai Phule was a social worker, poet, and teacher and worked actively towards women's freedom and situation in Indian society.

i. She opened India's **first** school for girls in **1848** in **Pune** and became India's first woman teacher and first Indian headmistress.

ii. She published her first collection of poems, named Kavya Phule ('Poetry's Blossoms') in 1854 and also published Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar ('The Ocean of Pure Gems'), in 1892.

Note: Pune University, Pune (Maharashtra), is named after Savitribai Phule as a tribute to her efforts for women's education in India.

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw Inaugurated NIELIT Deemed to be University in Assam

In January 2025, Union Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw**, Ministry of Railways (MoR), Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) and Ministry of Electronics & Information (MeitY) and Governor of Assam **Lakshman Prasad Acharya** along with Chief Minister (CM) of Assam **Himanta Biswa Sarma** jointly inaugurated 'National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology' (**NIELIT Deemed to be University**) at 12 locations including five locations in the North Eastern States at an event held in Guwahati, Assam.

- Union Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw** informed that the new campus of NIELIT will be developed in Jagiroad(Assam), which will focus on semiconductor manufacturing and electronics manufacturing.

i.The NIELIT, the only University under the MeitY, established in 1994 to enhance education and research in Electronics and Information Technology(IT).

ii.During the event, NIELIT and Bangalore (Karnataka) based Tata Electronics Private Limited (TEPL) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) to enhance the semiconductor skill development ecosystem in India.

About Tata Electronics Private Limited (TEPL):

Managing Director(**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Randhir Thakur

Headquarters – Bengaluru, Karnataka

Incorporated – 2020

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About NIELIT:

i.The NIELIT, the only University under the MeitY, established in 1994 to enhance education and research in Electronics and Information Technology(IT).

- It aims to train more than 3.7 million students in emerging technologies over the next five years.

ii.It follows the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which focuses on making education more accessible, flexible, and relevant to industry needs.

iii.In July 2024, the Ministry of Education (MoE) following the recommendation of the University Grants Commission (UGC), issued a notification declaring NIELIT Ropar (Punjab) and its 11 constituent units as Deemed to be University.

- The 11 centers in cities include Aizawl (Mizoram), Agartala (Tripura), Aurangabad (Maharashtra), Kozhikode (Kerala), Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh, UP), Imphal (Manipur), Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh, AR), Kekri (Rajasthan), Kohima (Nagaland), Patna (Bihar), and Srinagar (Jammu and Kashmir, J&K), aims to transform higher education in digital technologies.

iv.The university will offer advanced education in digital technologies in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and rural areas, preparing skilled students and positioning the North East as a "New Engine" for national growth.

v.The advanced technologies include Semiconductor & Manufacturing, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning(ML), Block chain Technology, Automotive Electronics, Drone Technology, Cyber Security & Forensics, Bioinformatics, Industry 4.0 and Quantum Computing.

vi.NIELIT, with over 50 centers, 700 accredited institutes, and 9,000 facilitation centers, has been providing students and professionals across India.

NIELIT & TEPL Signed MoU for Skill Development:

During the event, **NIELIT** and Bangalore (Karnataka) based Tata Electronics Private Limited (**TEPL**) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) to enhance the semiconductor skill development ecosystem in India.

- The MoU was signed by **Madan Mohan Tripathi**, Director General (DG) of NIELIT, and **Randhir Thakur**, Managing Director (MD) & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of TEPL.

i.The partnership aims to establish skill centers, develop diploma and certification programs, and organise workshops focused on Semiconductor Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging (ATMP) technologies.

ii.Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Private Limited(TSAT) will offer technical expertise and internships, while NIELIT will handle education, training, and outreach, with both organizations collaborating on research, funding, and creating opportunities in Northeast India.

About Tata Electronics Private Limited (TEPL):

Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Randhir Thakur

Headquarters – Bangalore, Karnataka

Incorporated – 2020

Union Home Minister Amit Shah Launched 'BHARATPOL' portal to Revolutionize International Crime Investigations

On January 07 2025, Union Minister **Amit Shah**, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and Ministry of Cooperation (MoC) launched the 'BHARATPOL' portal during the event held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, Delhi.

- He also awarded 35 Central Bureau of Investigation (**CBI**) officers and officials with the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service and the Union Home Minister's Medal for Excellence in Investigation.

About 'BHARATPOL' portal :

i.The portal is developed by the **CBI**, which aims to streamline the process for Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in India to seek international assistance through International Criminal Police Organisation (**INTERPOL**) in criminal matters.

ii.The portal will be managed by the CBI, which also acts as India's National Central Bureau (NCB) for INTERPOL. This portal will enable the CBI to coordinate international police requests, including those related to Red notices and other INTERPOL alerts.

- The portal will provide quicker and more efficient real-time sharing of information among Indian LEAs and other international law agencies.

iii.The five key modules of Bharatpol are connect, Interpol notices, references, broadcast, and resources, providing a technological platform to support all our law enforcement agencies.

iv.It will enhance collaboration between central, state, Union Territory (UT) LEAs, providing seamless communication between various police organisations in India.

v.The portal will replace previously used communication methods like: letters, emails, and faxes, with faster, digital solutions .This will ensure more efficient exchanges among CBI, INTERPOL liaison officers (ILOs), and unit officers (UOs).

vi.It will also address the increasing threat of translational crimes such as: cybercrime, financial fraud, human trafficking, and organised crime by providing rapid international assistance.

About Ministry of Home Affairs(MHA):

Union Minister-_Amit Shah (Constituency- Gandhinagar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (MoS)- Bandi Sanjay Kumar (Constituency- Karimnagar, Telangana)

About International Criminal Police Organisation (INTERPOL):

Secretary General- Valdecy Urquiza(Brazil)

Headquarters- Lyon, France

Established- 1923

Chhattisgarh: India's 1st State to Integrate Forest Ecosystems into Green GDP

In January 2024, **Chhattisgarh** has become the **first state** in India to introduce an innovative plan that connects the ecosystem services of its forest with the Green Gross Domestic Product (**Green GDP**).

- The initiative aims to directly link the environmental contributions of forests like clean air, water conservation, biodiversity and the state's economic progress.
- It aligns with Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Developed India 2047'.
- Chhattisgarh, where forests cover **44%** of the land, relies on its rich natural resources to support the livelihoods of millions.

Key Points:

i. Forests play a dual role in Chhattisgarh's economy and environment, significantly boosting the rural economy through products like tendu leaves, lac, honey, and medicinal plants, while also helping combat climate change by acting as carbon sinks.

ii. The action plan seeks to balance economic growth with environmental conservation to protect the ecosystem for future generations.

iii. By linking these benefits to Green GDP, Chhattisgarh aims to improve budget planning and promote policies for sustainable development.

iv. It recognizes the key benefits of forests, like climate regulation, soil enrichment, water purification, and carbon absorption, and incorporates these into the state's economic planning.

v. Scientists will evaluate the essential ecosystem services of forests to estimate their economic value accurately. This involves

Clean Air: The amount of Carbon-di-oxide (CO₂) absorbed by trees and converted into oxygen will be quantified, and its market value will be included in the Green GDP.

Water Conservation: The economic impact of water supplied by forests through rivers and springs will be calculated.

Biodiversity: The role of forest fauna, including animals, birds, and insects, in maintaining ecological balance and supporting agriculture will be assessed.

About Green Gross Domestic Product (Green GDP):

i. Green GDP is a metric for measuring economic growth that takes into account the environmental costs of economic activities.

ii. Green GDP Calculation: When calculating Green GDP, the environmental and social costs associated with economic development are taken into account.

$$\text{Green GDP} = \text{GDP} - \text{Environmental Costs} - \text{Social Costs}$$

About Chhattisgarh:

Capital – Raipur

Chief Minister (**CM**) – Vishnu Deo Sai

Governor – Ramen Deka

Dance – Saila Dance, Karma, Sua Nacha, Panthi Dance

India-Malaysia First Security Dialogue to Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation

On January 7, 2025, India and Malaysia held their 1st inaugural **India-Malaysia Security Dialogue** in New Delhi (Delhi) to enhance bilateral cooperation. It aims to strengthen defence and security ties between the 2 nations for deeper cooperation in areas crucial to their mutual interests.

- The 1st India-Malaysia Security Dialogue was co-chaired by India's National Security Adviser (NSA) to Indian Prime Minister, **Ajit Doval** and Malaysia's Director General (DG) of the National Security Council, Raja Dato' **Nushirwan Bin Zainal Abidin**.

Highlights:

i.Collaboration: The meeting centered on strengthening collaboration in counter-terrorism, deradicalisation, cybersecurity, defence industry and maritime security.

ii.Institutionalisation: The 2 countries agreed to institutionalise the dialogue with **annual meetings** to ensure regular discussions and continued cooperation.

iii.Enhancement: They also explored opportunities for enhancing cooperation in the strategic fields of critical minerals and rare earths.

iv.Both sides exchanged views on the evolving **global** and regional security environment, reflecting their shared commitment to addressing security challenges in the world.

v.This security dialogue follows the visit of **Malaysian** Prime Minister (**PM**) Dato' Seri **Anwar bin Ibrahim** in **August 2024** to India at PM Narendra Modi's invitation.

Points to be noted:

- Malaysia is India's 13th largest trade partner and the 3rd largest among Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN) members.
- In 2023, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's (HAL) first regional office in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

About Malaysia:

Prime Minister (**PM**)– Anwar bin Ibrahim

Capital- Kuala Lumpur

Currency- Malaysian ringgit (**MYR**)

Titagarh Rail Delivers India's First Driverless 'Make-in-India' Trainset to Bengaluru Metro

In January 2025, **Titagarh Rail Systems Limited**, formerly Titagarh Wagons Limited, has made a significant stride in India's urban mobility sector by delivering **India's 1st driverless, Made-in-India trainset** to Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (**BMRCL**).

- The delivery marks a pivotal moment for the Yellow Line of the Bengaluru Metro, which covers an 18-kilometer (km) stretch from Electronics City. This initiative aligns with the national goal to achieve a Viksit Bharat by 2047.
- i.**The trainset is an automated, stainless steel-bodied model built for superior performance.
 - ii.**It was constructed at Titagarh Rail's metro manufacturing facility in Uttarpara, West Bengal(WB).
 - iii.**Titagarh Rail will provide two additional trainsets to BMRCL by April 2025 and ramp up production to two units per month by September 2025.
 - iv.**This achievement showcases India's commitment to advancing urban mobility solutions while promoting local manufacturing under the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India) initiative.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

GEAPP Partners with ISA to Propel India's Green Energy Future

On January 7, 2025, the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (**GEAPP**) partnered with the International Solar Alliance (**ISA**), launched Multi-Donor Trust Fund (**MDTF**), Digitalization of Utilities for Energy Transition (**DUET**), and Energy Transitions Innovation Challenge 2.0 (**ENTICE 2.0**) which aimed at advancing India's renewable energy sector.

- These partnerships boost India's ambitious target of **500 gigawatts** (GW) of renewable energy capacity by 2030.

Three Key Initiatives and Partnerships

i. Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF): GEAPP strengthened its partnership with ISA by signing **ISA's MDTF** with the goal of raising **USD 100 million** to support solar energy projects in India.

ii. DUET (Digitalization of Utilities for Energy Transition): The **DUET** program focuses on modernizing India's grid systems to create a digital database of grid assets, including their locations and specifications.

iii. ENTICE 2.0: This platform is set to launch in **January 2025** and was designed to support startups by offering funding, market access and mentorship to scale innovative solutions for India's clean energy transition.

About Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP):

i. GEAPP was launched by the Rockefeller Foundation at the **2021** United Nations (UN's) Climate Change Conference (COP26) to promote universal energy access and meet critical climate goals.

- Its work is organized around **3 catalytic themes**: distributed renewable energy, green grids and green economy.

ii. It provides country-level support to 7 foundation countries, focuses on replicable and scalable solutions in an additional 13 countries and reaches 80+ countries.

- **7 foundation countries:** Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Vietnam.

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Woonchong Um

Headquarters- New York, United States of America (**USA**)

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- GEAPP, through its Project Management Unit (PMU), will support ISA by providing governance oversight, facilitating fund raising efforts, and leveraging its expertise in energy transition planning, financing, and project implementation .

ii. DUET (Digitalization of Utilities for Energy Transition): The **DUET** program focuses on modernizing India's grid systems to create a digital database of grid assets, including their locations and specifications.

- Additionally, smart sensors will be installed to monitor voltage, current and phase in real time.
- DUET aims to reduce energy losses, optimize Battery Energy Storage System (**BESS**) deployment and integrate Decentralized Renewable Energy (**DRE**) sources into the grid.

Note: The government estimates 47 GW of battery energy storage systems by 2032.

iii. ENTICE 2.0: This platform is set to launch in **January 2025** and was designed to support startups by offering funding, market access and mentorship to scale innovative solutions for India's clean energy transition.

- The program aims to identify investable projects that will help India achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**) while promoting job creation and economic growth in the renewable energy sector.

iv. These initiatives align with India's broader Energy Transition Planning (ETP), aim to close funding gaps, strengthen institutional capacity, and promote scalable, cost-effective solutions for India's clean energy transition.

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About International Solar Alliance (ISA):

ISA was launched by the Prime Minister (**PM**) of India, Narendra Modi and the former President of France, **Francois Hollande** during the COP21 Paris Climate Conference held in November 2015.

- ISA became the 1st international intergovernmental organization to be headquartered in Haryana, India.

Director General (**DG**)- Ajay Mathur

President- Narendra Modi

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI releases MD on Credit Information Reporting

On January 6, 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released a a '**Master Direction – Reserve Bank of India (Credit Information Reporting) Directions, 2025**', consolidating its various guidelines for banks and financial institutions regarding the reporting of Customer Credit Information(CCI).

- RBI issued these directions in the exercise of the powers conferred under **Section 11** of the Credit Information Companies (CICs) (Regulation) Act, 2005.
- The purpose of issuing the MD is to establish a standardized framework for the reporting and dissemination of credit information, ensure the confidentiality and security of sensitive credit data, and address other related objectives.

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Key Points:

i. Credit Information Companies (**CICs**) are required to notify customers via Short Message Service (SMS) or electronic mail (e-mail) whenever their Credit Information Report (**CIR**) is accessed by specified users (SUs).

- CICs shall send alerts only when the Credit Information Report (CIR) inquiry is reflected in the customer's CIR.

ii. Credit Institutions (**CI**s), including banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (**NBFC**s), must inform customers of the reasons for rejecting their requests for data correction, if applicable, to help them better understand the issues in their CIR.

iii. Complainants are entitled to a compensation of **Rs. 100** per calendar day if their complaint is not resolved within thirty (30) calendar days from the date of the initial filing with a CI or CIC.

Note: RBI has mandated that all lenders must update credit bureau records every 15 days, effective January 1, 2025.

About Credit Information Companies (CICs):

i. CICs collect public data, credit transactions, and payment histories of people and businesses, mainly for loans and credit cards.

ii. They collect data from banks, financial institutions, lenders, and other credit-granting entities, and then compile it into credit reports.

iii. Banks and financial institutions use CIC reports and scores to evaluate your creditworthiness before approving loans or credit cards.

iv. CICs in India are licensed by RBI and regulated by the Credit Information Companies Regulation Act, 2005 (CICRA), and RBI guidelines.

- Under Section 15 of the CICRA, every credit institution, such as banks, must be a member of at least one CIC.
- The act states that a CIC can only obtain information from its member institutions.

v. India currently has only **four** credit information companies registered with the RBI. They are

- Credit Information Bureau (India) Limited (CIBIL)
- Equifax Credit Information Services Private Limited
- Experian Credit Information Company of India Private Limited
- CRIF High Mark Credit Information Services Private Limited

SEBI eases Settlement Norms for Inactive Brokerage Accounts

On January 06 2025, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (**SEBI**) eased settlement norms for **brokerage accounts** that remain inactive for **over 30 calendar days**. It will take effect immediately, replacing SEBI's August 2024 circular on the same matter.

- This change aims to reduce procedural inefficiencies for brokers, making the process smoother by eliminating the daily settlement requirement.

i. Previously, brokers were obligated to identify inactive clients and return their funds within **3 working days**.

ii. The new SEBI guidelines allow brokers to settle the funds of clients who haven't traded for 30 calendar days on the upcoming settlement dates as per the monthly cycle, specified in stock exchanges' **annual calendars**.

Note: A brokerage account is considered inactive if the client has not made any trades (buying or selling stocks) for 30 days in a row.

MFIN Defers Limit on Lenders to 3 per Borrower from April 1 2025

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Microfinance Institutions Network (**MFIN**), the self-regulatory organization (**SRO**) for the microfinance sector, announced the postponement of its new rule that limits the number of lenders to **3 per borrower**, down from 4 borrower to manage microfinance risks.

- Initially set to take effect on January 1, 2025, but now the implementation of this regulation postponed to **April 1, 2025**.
- The new regulations are aimed at ensuring better financial management and preventing over-indebtedness.

i. The postponement is to provide financial institutions enough time to adapt their Information Technology (IT) systems and business rule engines for smoother implementation.

ii. Other regulations, such as capping outstanding loans at **Rs.2 lakh** per borrower and stopping lending to delinquent customers took effect on **January 1, 2025**. And also directed its members to stop providing loans to customers whose overdue amounts exceed ₹3,000 and have been pending for more than 60 days

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

India's GDP Expected to Grow by 6.4% in FY25 against 8.2% in FY24: First Advanced Estimates by NSO

On January 07 2025, the National Statistics Office (**NSO**), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (**MoSPI**) released the [First Advanced Estimate \(FAE\) of Annual Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\) for the Financial Year 2024-25 \(FY25\)](#), along with its expenditure components both at Constant (2011-12) and Current Prices.

- As per the NSO data, India's Real GDP is expected to grow at a 4-year low i.e. at **6.4%** in FY25 against the growth rate of 8.2% in Provisional Estimate (PE) of GDP for FY24 (2023-24).

i. Nominal GDP or GDP at Current Prices in FY25 is estimated at **Rs 324.11 lakh crore** as against Rs 295.36 lakh crore in FY24, reflecting a growth rate of 9.7%.

ii. Real Gross Value Added (GVA) registered a growth of **6.4%** (FY25) as compared to 7.2% (FY24). It is estimated to grow from Rs 158.74 lakh crore PE for (FY24) to **Rs 168.91 lakh crore** in (FY25).

About Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI):

Minister of State (**MoS**) (Independent Charge, IC)–Rao Inderjit Singh (Constituency–Gurugram, Haryana)

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Key Highlights

i. Real GDP Growth: As per the NSO data, India's Real GDP is expected to grow at a 4-year low i.e. at 6.4% in FY25 against the growth rate of 8.2% in Provisional Estimate (PE) of GDP for FY24 (2023-24).

- Real GDP or GDP at Constant **(2011-12)** prices is estimated at **Rs 184.88 lakh crore** in **FY25**, compared to the PE of GDP at Rs 173.82 lakh crore in FY24.

ii. Nominal GDP Growth: Nominal GDP has registered a growth rate of 9.7% in FY25 compared to the growth rate of 9.6% in FY24.

- Nominal GDP or GDP at Current Prices in FY25 is estimated at **Rs 324.11 lakh crore** as against Rs 295.36 lakh crore in FY24, reflecting a growth rate of 9.7%.

iii. Gross Value Added (GVA):

- Real Gross Value Added (GVA) registered a growth of **6.4%** (FY25) as compared to 7.2% (FY24). It is estimated to grow from Rs 158.74 lakh crore PE for (FY24) to **Rs 168.91 lakh crore** in (FY25).
- Nominal GVA registered a growth rate of **9.3% in FY25** as against the growth rate of 8.5% in FY24. It is estimated to achieve **Rs 292.64 lakh crore** during FY25, against Rs 267.62 lakh crore in FY24.

iv. Private and Government Consumption:

- The report highlighted that Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) at Constant Prices grew by 7.3% in FY25, compared to 4.0% in FY24.
- While, Government Final Consumption Expenditure (**GFCE**), which refers to centre government spending on goods and services, at Constant Prices, has rebounded to a growth rate of **4.1%** as against the growth rate of 2.5% in FY24.

v. Investment: The report has further estimated that Gross Fixed Capital Formation (**GFCF**), an indicator of new investments in the economy, will grow at 6.4% in FY25 compared with a 9% increase in FY24.

Sector-Wise Real GVA Growth in FY25:

i.The report highlighted that out of 8 broad economic sectors, only two are estimated to register higher growth than previous year.

1.Primary Sector:

- Agriculture and its allied sector are estimated to increase to 3.8% (in FY25) from 1.4% (in FY24).
- Public, Administration, Defence and Other Services, estimated to increase from 7.8% (in FY24) to 9.1% (in FY25).
- GVA growth of Mining & Quarrying is expected to increase to 2.9% in FY25, compared to 7.1% registered in FY24.

2.Secondary sector:

- The cumulative growth of sectors like: electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services from 7.5% (in FY24) to 6.8% (in FY25).
- The construction segment is estimated to grow at 8.6% in FY25 from 9.9% during the previous financial year.
- While, GVA growth of manufacturing sector is expected to decelerate to 5.3% (in FY25) from a high of 9.9% recorded (in FY24) .

3.Tertiary sector: According to NSO data, GVA of sectors like: financial, real estates and professional services expected to grow at 7.3% (in FY25), down from 8.4% (in FY24).

- The combined growth rate of hotel, trade, transport, and services related to broadcasting, is estimated to grow at **5.8%** (in FY25) as against 6.4% registered in last financial year.

Assessment:

i.These estimates are indicator based and compiled using the bench-mark indicator method(estimates available for FY24) are extrapolated using the relevant indicators showing the performance of indicators.

ii.The sector-estimates are prepared using different indicators/data sources like: Index of Industrial Production (IIP), financial performances of listed companies based on available quarterly financial results of these companies for Q1 and Q2 of FY25, premium related information of life and non-life insurance companies, among others.

About Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementaion (MoSPI):

Minister of State (**MoS**) (Independent Charge, IC)–Rao Inderjit Singh (Constituency-Gurugram, Haryana)

SBI Lowers India's GDP Growth Forecast to 6.3% for FY25

On January 07 2025, the State Bank of India (**SBI**) released its latest [Ecowrap Research Report](#). It has lowered India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecast to **6.3%** for Financial Year 2024-25(FY25), which is marginally lower than the National Statistics Office (**NSO**)'s estimate of 6.4%.

- The report noted a "**downward bias**" in its projection and has cited several challenges affecting economic growth of the country, including a slowdown in lending and manufacturing, coupled with the effects of a large base effect from the preceding year.
- Also, slowdown in total demand during the fiscal year is reflected in the First Advance Estimates (FAE) for GDP released by NSO in January, 2025.

Key Points:

i.The report highlighted the contributions of certain sectors towards India's overall GDP growth. Government Consumption is expected to grow at **8.5%** in nominal terms and **4.1%** in real terms, providing some boost to the economy.

ii.The report raised concern over the deceleration in key industrial segments. Industry segment is estimated to grow at 6.2%, decrease from 9.5% registered in FY24.

- The services sector is expected to increase marginally to 7.2% in FY25, from 7.6% in FY24.
- Agriculture and allied sectors are expected to register significant growth of 3.8% in FY25 compared to 1.4% registered in FY24.

iii.SBI's report highlighted that Private Consumption has emerged as an important driver of economic growth, with an estimated real growth rate of 7.3% in FY25, an increase from 4.0% in FY24.

- This growth is mainly attributed to strong agricultural growth and lower food inflation.
- The report showed that the per capita Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) registered a growth of 6.3% higher than the per capita GDP growth of 5.3%.

iv. Despite slowdown in real GDP and stagnant nominal GDP, per capita nominal GDP is projected to be approximately Rs 35,000 in FY25 higher than in FY23.

- However, nominal GDP growth is anticipated to remain stagnant, growing by 9.7% in FY25 compared to 9.6% in FY24.
- The Gross Value Added (GVA) growth is also pegged at 6.4%.

v. The report showed that as of December 31, 2024, All Scheduled Commercial Banks(ASCBs) incremental credit slowed to Rs 11.5 lakh crore, Year to Date (YTD) 7.0%, compared to growth of Rs 21.0 lakh crore (YTD 15.4%) in FY24.

CIL and IREL Partner for Critical Minerals Developments

On January 7 2025, Kolkata (West Bengal) based Coal India Limited (**CIL**) under the Ministry of Coal(MoC), signed a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Indian Rare Earths Limited (**IREL**), a Public Sector Undertaking(PSU) under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) to collaborate on the development of **critical minerals**.

- The partnership aims to boost India's ability to mine, extract, refine, and source critical minerals like mineral sands and Rare Earth Elements (REE), essential for electronics, Renewable Energy(RE), and defense industries.
- This collaboration is a key component of CIL's initiative to lessen India's reliance on essential minerals such as lithium and cobalt imports.

i.Under this partnership, the two

companies will work together to acquire assets, source raw materials domestically or internationally, and develop mining, extraction, and refining capabilities.

ii.In the Union Budget 2024-25, the Government of India (GoI) announced the Critical Mineral Mission to boost domestic production, recycling, and asset acquisition.

Note: India, one of the few countries producing rare earth elements, relies on IREL to achieve self-sufficiency in mining, processing, and refining, while **China** remains the dominant player in critical minerals.

Tata Elxsi Partners With CSIR-NAL for AAM Solutions

On January 8, 2025, Bengaluru, (Karnataka) based Tata Elxsi Limited, global design and technology services provider, partnered with Council of Scientific & Industrial Research-National Aerospace Laboratories (**CSIR-NAL**) to innovate in Advanced Air Mobility (**AAM**).

- The collaboration was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**), aimed to develop **cutting-edge technologies** for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Urban Air Mobility (UAM) and electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft.
- It focuses on technologies such as aerodynamic design, autonomous systems and secure communications to address the unique needs of both manned and unmanned AAM.

i.The partnership combines NAL's extensive aeronautical research expertise with Tata Elxsi's advanced capabilities in electrification, Artificial intelligence (**AI**), Machine Learning (**ML**), sensor fusion and certification processes.

ii.These entities aim to fast-track innovation and product development cycles for applications in logistics, agriculture, defence and urban transportation in both domestic and international markets.

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

CCI approvals on January 7th 2025

On January 7 2025, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) has approved the following proposals:

- i.**Tata Electronics Private Limited (**TEPL**), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Sons, to acquire a majority stake in Apple's contract manufacturer **Pegatron Technology** India Private Limited (Pegatron India).
- ii.**Gentari Renewables India Management Private Limited to acquire **21** Special Purpose Vehicles (**SPVs**) owning renewable power generation plants, alongside the holding companies of certain SPVs to boost Gentari's renewable energy portfolio and sustainable energy goals .
- iii.**The United States of America (USA)-based global investment firm CA Carob Investments to acquire up to **68.9% stake** in Roop Automotives Limited (RAL), a key player in India's automotive components industry.

About Competition Commission of India (CCI):

It is a statutory body constituted under Competition Act, 2002.

Chairman- Ravneet Kaur

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2003

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- ii.**Malaysia based **Gentari Renewables India** Management Private Limited to acquire **21** Special Purpose Vehicles (**SPVs**) owning renewable power generation plants, along with the holding companies of certain SPVs.
- iii.**The United States of America (USA)-based global investment firm **CA Carob Investments** to acquire up to **68.9% stake** in Roop Automotives Limited (**RAL**), a key player in India's automotive components industry.

CCI approves TEPL to acquire majority stake in Pegatron India

i. The CCI has approved TEPL proposal to acquire a majority stake in Pegatron India.

- This acquisition is a significant step for TEPL which specializes in Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS), particularly for smartphones.
- The transaction was structured in 2 phases, including the transfer of **TEL Components Private Limited's** business to Pegatron India.

ii. TEPL, through Tata Electronics Systems Solutions (**TESS**) (formerly known as Wistron Infocomm Manufacturing (India) Private Limited), was also engaged in the provision of EMS for smartphones.

Points to Note:

i. TEPL had earlier acquired the **iPhone** unit of Taiwanese firm 'Wistron' in Bengaluru (Karnataka) for **USD 125 million** in November 2023.

- It is also building another plant in Hosur in Tamil Nadu.

ii. Pegatron India provides EMS to Apple Inc., with exports to North America (NA), Asia and Europe.

CCI approves Gentari Renewables India's acquisition of 21 SPVs:

i. The **CCI** has given its approval for Gentari Renewables India Management Private Limited to acquire **21** Special Purpose Vehicles (**SPVs**) that own Renewable Energy (RE) plants.

- These SPVs are engaged in generating and selling power through wind turbines and solar power plants.
- Along with these SPVs, the holding companies of certain SPVs will also be acquired by Gentari Renewables India.

ii. Gentari (the acquirer) is an indirect subsidiary of **Petroleum Nasional Berhad (Petronas)**, a Malaysian multinational oil and gas company, which is focused on delivering clean energy solutions.

- The company's core pillars include renewable energy, hydrogen, and green mobility.

iii. This strategic acquisition strengthens Gentari's RE portfolio, contributing to India's sustainable energy goals and boosting investments in clean energy infrastructure.

CCI approves the acquisition of 68.9% stake in Roop Automotives by CA Carob Investments

i.The CCI has approved CA Carob Investments' proposal to acquire up to **68.9% stake** in Roop Automotives Limited (RAL).

- This acquisition involves interconnected steps, including a securities swap between Highway Industries Limited (**HIL**) shareholders and **RAL**, ultimately leading to the acquisition by CA Carob Investments.

ii.The acquisition boosts RAL's growth, enhancing its operational scale and India's goal of **Atmanirbhar Bharat** (self-reliance), contributing to the development of the auto-components sector.

iii.CA Carob Investments (Investor) is a SPV based in Mauritius, controlled by affiliates of the global investment firm Carlyle Group Inc.(Carlyle).

iv.RAL and HIL manufactures and sells auto-components, with a strong presence in both domestic and international markets.

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Chairperson- Ravneet Kaur

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

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SPORTS

Australia beats India 3-1 to win Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years

Australia beats India 3-1 in 5 match test series to win Border-Gavaskar Trophy after 10 years and final test of the Series was held on **5th January** 2025 at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney, Australia.

- The Border Gavaskar Trophy 2024-25 was scheduled from **22nd November 2024 to 7th January 2025** in Australia.
- This marks the first time Australia had won the series over India in the last **10** years since the they won at home in **2014-15**.
- India has won **four** consecutive series (**2016-17, 2018-19,2020-21 and 2022-23**) including two in Australia.

Key Highlights:

i.India won the **1st** match series at Perth by **295 runs** but Australia won the 2nd one in Adelaide, by 10 wickets.

- The 3rd match ended in draw in Brisbane but Australia won the 4th test in Melbourne by 184 runs and then the final test in Sydney.

ii.India off-spinner **Ravichandran Ashwin** had announced his **retirement** from international cricket in which he secured a total of **765 wickets** for India across the formats.

iii.Virat Kohli scored his **7th** test century in the Perth Test surpassing **Sachin Tendulkar's** tally of 6 Test centuries in Australia.

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- The 3rd match ended in draw in Brisbane but Australia won the 4th test in Melbourne by 184 runs and then the final test in Sydney.

ii. Australia have qualified for the **World Test Championship** (WTC) final for the second consecutive time after this win and will compete with **South Africa** in the final at Lord's on 11th June 2025.

iii. **Pat Cummins** has become the **first** captain since Michael Clarke and Steven Smith (combined) in **2015** to win a Test series against India.

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v. Virat Kohli scored his **7th** test century in the Perth Test surpassing **Sachin Tendulkar's** tally of 6 Test centuries in Australia.

India broke 47-year record with commanding Perth Test win

i. India broke a 47-year-old record by **295-run** win in the opening Test of the five-match series at Optus Stadium in Perth Australia and making it India's biggest victory against Australia in Australia in terms of runs. The previous record stood at 222 runs, achieved at Melbourne on December 30, 1977.

Bumrah named Player of the Series after record-breaking tour of Australia

i. Jasprit Bumrah was awarded with the **Player of the Series** title as he emerged as the highest wicket taker of the tournament with **32** wickets.

- He has broken the 47-year-old record of **Bishan Singh Bedi** who secured **31** wickets during India's tour of Australia in 1977-78.
- Also, Bumrah's average of **13.06** ranks is second only to **Richard Hadlee's** 12.15 in 1985 among bowlers who have secured more than 20 wickets in a Test series in Australia.

ii. He has become the **first Indian** bowler to win a Player of the Series award in Test matches across three **SENA** nations (South Africa, England, Australia and New Zealand).

- Furthermore, he is the only **second** pacer, after **Brett Lee** in 2007-08, to win the Player of the Series award in the prestigious Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

iii. He had previously won the Player of the Series award during India's tour of **England** in 2022-23 where he took 23 wickets in 5 matches and also during India's tour of **South Africa** in 2024 where he became the first and only Indian bowler to secure took 12 wickets in two matches.

Bumrah equals with Kapil Dev for SENNA countries record during Perth Test

Jasprit Bumrah made history by securing his **7th five**-wicket haul in SENNA (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia) and He has equaled with **Kapil Dev**.

- During the Perth match, Bumrah claimed **five** wickets for just 30 runs at an economy rate of 1.67.
- Now in **27** Tests in SENNA countries, Bumrah has got **118 wickets** at an average of 22.55.

Bumrah quickest Indian to 200 Test wickets by balls bowled

i. Jasprit Bumrah has become the fastest Indian bowler to reach **200** Test wickets.

ii. Bumrah made his 200th Test wicket off only the **8484th** delivery he has bowled in the format, making him the fastest Indian to the mark in terms of balls bowled, surpassing **Mohammed Shami** who took his 200th wicket from his 9896th delivery.

iii. Overall, Bumrah is now the **fourth**-fastest bowler to achieve 200 wickets, behind **Waqar Younis** (7725 balls), Dale Steyn (7848 balls), and Kagiso Rabada (8154 balls).

- He has also become the first bowler to achieve 200 wickets with a **sub-20** bowling average (**19.56**).

Rishabh Pant slams fastest Test fifty in Australia by a visiting batter

i. Rishabh Pant smashed the fastest Test **half-century** in just **29** balls in Australia by a visiting batter.

- He has broken the record of **33** balls held by England's **John Brown** (Melbourne 1895) and West Indies' **Roy Fredericks** (Perth 1975).
- It also marked the **second**-fastest half-century by an Indian batter in Test cricket.

ii. The fastest half-century record by an Indian batter in a Test match also belongs to Pant which he made in 28-balls against **Sri Lanka** in Bengaluru in 2022.

Note

Pant has also become the first Indian wicketkeeper to achieve mark of **25** dismissals against any opponent in a series.

About Border Gavaskar Trophy:

i.The Border–Gavaskar Trophy (BGT) is an International Test cricket tournament played between India and Australia.

ii.It named after former captains, Australia's **Allan Border** and India's **Sunil Gavaskar** and was first held in **1996-97**.

iii.Out of **17** test series, India have been victorious 10 times, Australia have won 6 times, and one series was drawn.

IMPORTANT DAYS

Earth's Rotation Day 2025 – January 8

Earth's Rotation Day is observed globally on **January 8** to highlight the importance of Earth's rotational motion. It commemorates the anniversary of French physicist **Léon Foucault's** scientific demonstration in 1851.

- **January 8 2025** marks the observance of the **174th** anniversary of Léon Foucault's demonstration.
- The day honors his 1st public display of Earth's rotation in Paris (France), emphasizing its scientific significance.

Basics of Earth's Rotation:

- i. The spinning of the Earth around its axis is called 'rotation.' Earth completes a full rotation on its axis every 23 hours and 56 minutes, rounded up to **24 hours**.
- ii. The full rotation is known as one Earth Day and is responsible for day and night cycles.
- iii. Earth rotates on its axis from West (W) to East (E), the Sun and the Moon appear to move from E to W across the sky.

History:

- i. In 470 Before Christ (BC), the Greeks claimed that the earth rotated on its own back.
- ii. In the 16th century, Polish astronomer **Nicolaus Copernicus** proposed the heliocentric model, suggesting Earth rotated on its axis and revolved around the Sun.

- This theory was confirmed by Galileo Galilei's observations of Jupiter's moon in 1610.

iii. In 1851, French physicist Léon Foucault provided conclusive proof of Earth's rotation with the **Foucault Pendulum** experiment.

- The principle of the experiment was 1st demonstrated in the Pantheon in Paris.

iv. The experiment involved suspending a 28 kilogram (kg) brass bob, 38 centimeters (cm) in diameter (d), hanging on a 67 meter (m) (220 foot) long wire.

v. It was the 1st satisfactory demonstration of the earth's rotation using laboratory apparatus rather than astronomical observations.

Note: Later, it was displayed at the Pantheon in Greece, (Rome, Italy).

Key Facts :

- i. Earth rotates on its axis on an imaginary line passing through the North(N) and South (S) Poles, at a speed of 1,670 kilometer per hour(km/h) (1,037 miles/h) at the equator.
- ii. The Earth's diameter is 12,714 km (7,900 miles) from N towards S Poles and 12,756 km (12,756 miles) via the equator (7,926 miles).

STATE NEWS

Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah Launched KSRTC Arogya Scheme for Cashless Medical Services

In January 2025, Chief Minister (CM) of Karnataka **Siddaramaiah** launched the health insurance scheme 'Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (**KSRTC**) **Arogya**', to provide cashless medical treatment to KSRTC employees and their families at the Vidhana Soudha in Bangalore, Karnataka.

- The scheme will benefit around 1.5 lakh people, including 34,000 employees and their dependents in over 275 hospitals.

Key benefits:

- KSRTC will deduct Rs 650 per month from the salary of each beneficiary for the scheme,, and this amount will increase by Rs.50 every year.
 - There is no limit on inpatient treatment expenses under the scheme and will also cover treatments like eye care, dental, Ayurvedic, Prakriti, Unani, and Homoeopathy.
 - The beneficiary must be a permanent resident of Karnataka and an employee of KSRTC. Selected employees will receive medical treatment coverage of up to Rs. 5 lakh under the KSRTC Arogya Scheme.
 - It will be extended to Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCL), North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC), and Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) within three months.
 - KSRTC has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with 275 hospitals and four diagnostic centers to offer cashless Inpatient (IP) and Outpatient Department (OPD) treatments.
- S R Srinivasa unveiled the internal magazine, 'Saarige Sampada' and the KSRTC Arogya Manual.

Note: Samparka Sarige is a non-AC bus service with a white-pink colour scheme. It operates as a shuttle service between Kempegowda Bus Station and Mysuru Road Bus Station in Bangalore.

About Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC):

KSRTC is formerly known as Mysore Government Road Transport Department (MGRTD) from 1948 to 1961 and Mysore State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) from 1961 to 1973. On 1 November 1973, it was renamed as the KSRTC.

Headquarters – Bangalore, Karnataka

Chairman – S.R. Srinivasa

10th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

BDL Partners with Ultra Maritime to Supply Sonobuoys for Indian Navy

In January 2025, Hyderabad-based **Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL)**, an Indian Defence Public Sector Undertaking, has partnered with **Ultra Maritime**, the United States of America(USA) based leading global provider of undersea warfare systems, to supply and manufacture **sonobuoys** of the US Navy standard for the Indian Navy (IN).

- This collaboration was announced by USA National Security Advisor(NSA) **Jake Sullivan** during his visit to India from January 5 to 6, 2025.
- These innovations will enhance sonar performance in the Indian Ocean, enabling better wide-area searches with custom solutions, as part of the USA.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) launched in May 2022.

Key Highlights:

- i.** Sonobuoys, which are critical for anti-submarine warfare (ASW), will be manufactured indigenously in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh(AP) at BDL's facilities as part of a Joint Venture(JV) with Ultra Maritime, with a facility set to become operational by **2027**.
- ii.** The Ultra Maritime sonobuoys produced in India are compatible and can be used by the U.S. Navy, IN and allied forces with P-8, MH-60R, and MQ-9B Sea Guardian aircraft.
- iii.** The IN operates '12 P-8I' maritime patrol aircraft, which drop the sonobuoys into the sea for anti-submarine operations.
- iv.** In August 2024, USA President Joe Biden's Administration had approved a USD 52.8 million government-to-government deal for the sale of U.S. sonobuoys to India.

About Sonobuoys:

i.Sonobuoys are small, disposable devices used in underwater sonar systems to detect submarines and other threats, helping in identifying and targeting adversarial ships and submarines for about 24 hours.

ii.A naval helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft usually releases sonobuoys in a specific pattern.

iii.The sonobuoys are dropped in canisters and activate automatically when they hit the water.

Types:

- **Active sonobuoys** emit sound energy, receive the echo, and transmit the information back to the aircraft based on the received echo.
- **Passive sonobuoys** listen for sounds from ships or submarines and transmit the detected sounds back to the aircraft.

About Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL):

Chairman and Managing Director (**CMD**) – Commodore A Madhavarao (Retired)

Headquarters – Hyderabad, Telangana

Established – 1970

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari Announces 'Cashless Treatment' Scheme for Road Accident Victims

On January 07, 2025, Union Minister **Nitin Jairam Gadkari**, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), announced the upgraded '**Cashless Treatment scheme**' for road accident victims, set to launch by **March 2025**. The announcement was made during a meeting with transport ministers from all states and Union Territories (UTs) held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, Delhi.

i. He also launched a nationwide scheme for establishing Driver Training Institutes (DTIs), offering incentives for setting up DTIs and additional rewards for integrating the infrastructure of Automated Testing Stations (ATs) and DTIs.

ii. The government will provide a Cashless Treatment for road accident victims nationwide, covering up to **Rs. 1.5 lakh** per person per accident for a maximum of **7 days**, provided the accident is reported to the police within 24 hours.

- Families of deceased victims in hit-and-run cases will receive an ex-gratia payment of **Rs. 2 lakh**.

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Background:

i. On March 14, 2024, MoRTH launched a pilot program of the Cashless Treatment scheme in **Chandigarh** to provide timely medical care to road accident victims.

ii. The program was later expanded to six states: Assam, Chandigarh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Puducherry, and Haryana.

About the Cashless Treatment Scheme:

i.The government will provide a Cashless Treatment for road accident victims nationwide, covering up to **Rs. 1.5 lakh** per person per accident for a maximum of **7 days**, provided the accident is reported to the police within 24 hours.

- Families of deceased victims in hit-and-run cases will receive an ex-gratia payment of **Rs. 2 lakh**.

ii.The scheme will cover **all road accidents** involving motor vehicles, regardless of the type of road.

iii.The program provides health benefit packages for trauma and polytrauma cases to eligible victims at hospitals accredited under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri-Jan Arogya Yojana (**AB PM-JAY**).

iii.The National Health Authority (NHA) will implement the program in coordination with the police, hospitals, and State Health Agencies(SHA).

iv.The program will be implemented using an Information Technology (IT) platform that integrates the e-Detailed Accident Report (eDAR) application(app) of MoRTH with the Transaction Management System of the NHA.

Key facts:

i.Nearly 1.80 lakh people died in road accidents in 2024, with 30,000 of those fatalities due to not wearing helmets.

- Of these accidents, 66% involved individuals aged between 18 and 34

ii.Inadequate safety measures at entry and exit points near educational institutions, including schools and colleges, led to the deaths of 10,000 children in road accidents.

About Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH):

Union Minister – Nitin Jairam Gadkari (Constituency- Nagpur, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (MoS)- General (Retd.) Vijay Kumar Singh (Constituency- Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

MeitY Partners with IITs for Skill Development to Boost Semiconductor Sector

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**) has initiated partnerships with various Indian Institutes of Technology (**IITs**) and private institutions and colleges, to provide training activities including skill development in **semiconductor** manufacturing. It was stated by S. Krishnan, Secretary of the MeitY in New Delhi(Delhi) on January 08 2025.

i.The USA-based software tech giant, **Microsoft Corporation, Inc.** has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with MeitY under the IndiaAI Mission, which aims to provide skill development training to 5 lakh students, teachers, and professionals in AI by 2026.

- Under this MoU, Microsoft in partnership with MeitY will set up an AI Center of Excellence (CoE) named 'AI Catalysts', to promote rural AI innovation and support 1 lakh AI innovators and developers through hackathons, community-building solutions and an AI marketplace.

ii.Microsoft announced collaborations with 5 key Indian Industries like:Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Limited, RailTel Corporation of India Limited (RailTel) upGrad Education Private Limited, Mahindra & Mahindra Limited and Bajaj Finserv Limited in sectors like: transport, healthcare, finance, agriculture and education.

About Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY):

Union Minister- Ashwini Vaishnaw (Rajya Sabha- Odisha)

Minister of State (MoS)- Jitin Prasada (Constituency- Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**) has initiated partnerships with various Indian Institutes of Technology (**IITs**) and private institutions and colleges, to provide training activities including skill development in **semiconductor** manufacturing. It was stated by S. Krishnan, Secretary of the MeitY in New Delhi(Delhi) on January 08 2025.

- This move will give a boost to the semiconductor sector in India and will strengthen India's position in global technology.

Key Points:

i. The MeitY informed that Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi-led government had already approved 5 semiconductor units under the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)** to locally develop semiconductors and display manufacturing ecosystem in India with total budget outlay of Rs 76,000 crore.

ii. The companies which are establishing semiconductor units under the ISM include: the United States of America (USA)-based Micron Technology Inc., Tata Electronics Private Limited (TEPL), Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test Private Limited, Karynes Semicon Private Limited, and CG Power and Industrial Solutions Limited (Crompton Greaves Limited), in collaboration with Japanese Renesas Electronics Corporation (RNECY) and Stars Microelectronics (Thailand) Public Company Limited.

iii. ISM, launched in 2021, is designed to promote the domestic semiconductor industry through incentives and strategic partnerships. It includes fabrication facilities (fabs), packaging, display wires, Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Testing (OSAT), sensors, and other key components.

Note: As per Industry estimates, the semiconductor market in India is expected to reach **USD 109 billion by 2030.**

Microsoft and MeitY Signed MoU to Train 5 Lakh Indians under IndiaAI Mission, Setup AI CoE in India

The United States of America (USA)-based software tech giant, **Microsoft Corporation, Inc.** has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with **MeitY** under the IndiaAI Mission, which aims to provide skill development training to **5 lakh students**, teachers, and professionals in AI by **2026.**

- This strategic partnership with MeitY aims to position India as a world leader in AI. It also aims to boost AI development and adoption in India and to foster inclusive, innovative and ethical AI ecosystem in India.
- This MoU was part of a series of collaborations announced by Satya Nadella, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Microsoft Corporation, Inc. , during his visit to India on January 08, 2025.

Note: These announcements came after Microsoft pledged to invest **USD 3 billion** to promote AI and cloud infrastructure in India over the next 2 years.

Key Points:

- i. Under this MoU, Microsoft in partnership with MeitY will set up an AI Center of Excellence (CoE) named '**AI Catalysts**', to promote rural AI innovation and support 1 lakh AI innovators and developers through hackathons, community-building solutions and an AI marketplace.
- ii. Microsoft will also establish '**AI Productivity Labs**' in 20 National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs) centers across 10 states in India, to provide foundational courses for 20,000 educators.

Other Key Announcements:

Microsoft also announced collaborations with **5 key Indian Industries** in sectors like: transport, healthcare, finance, agriculture and education.

- i. Microsoft will provide training to the employees of New Delhi(Delhi) based RailTel Corporation of India Limited (**RailTel**) in next-generation digital, cloud and AI technologies through its National Skills initiative and Enterprise Skilling initiative. It will also support RailTel in setting up an AI CoE.
- ii. Microsoft has entered into a **3-year** partnership with Indian edtech company, **upGrad Education Private Limited**, Bengaluru, Karnataka . This will enable the users of upGrad to learn in AI training programmes. Content developers on upGrad will also get access to GitHub Copilot to create learning materials.
- iii. Microsoft partnered with Indian automobile manufacturing company, Mumbai(Maharashtra) based **Mahindra & Mahindra Limited**, to develop various AI projects that include agentic and multimodal scenarios for the automotive division, chatbot solutions for the farm and tractors division, among others.
- iv. Microsoft collaborated with Pune(Maharashtra) based **Bajaj Finserv Limited**, Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC), which is implementing AI use cases across workstreams, powered by Microsoft's advanced AI technologies, with an expected annual cost of Rs 150 crore in Financial Year 2025-26 (FY26).
- v. Microsoft partnered with Chennai(Tamil Nadu, TN) based **Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Limited** to provide assistance to Apollo Hospitals in India, with its data strategy, engineering platform, and merging AI to create new Intellectual Property (IP).

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About IndiaAI Mission:

i. In March 2024, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi approved IndiaAI mission with budget outlay of **Rs 10,371.92 crore** (USD 1.25 billion) for over the next **5 years**.

ii. It is being implemented by IndiaAI, an Independent Business Division (IBD) under the Digital India Corporation (DIC) of MeitY.

iii. It is based on 7 key pillars: IndiaAI Compute Capacity, IndiaAI innovation centre, IndiaAI Datasets platform, IndiaAI application development initiative, IndiaAI future skills, IndiaAI startup financing, Safe and Trusted AI.

About Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY):

Union Minister- Ashwini Vaishnaw (Rajya Sabha- Odisha)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Jitin Prasada (Constituency- Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

WEP Launches 'EmpowHER Biz' Partners with New Shop to Empower Women Entrepreneurs

On January 8 2025, the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (**WEP**) of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog partnered with **New Shop**, a 24/7 convenience retail chain based in New Delhi(Delhi), to launch the initiative '**EmpowHER Biz – Sapno Ki Udaan**'. It was part of WEP's Award to Reward (ATR) initiative.

- This collaboration aims to **empower women entrepreneurs** and drive growth in the organized retail sector.

Note: ATR initiative was launched in 2023, provides a framework for collaborative projects that deliver measurable impact.

About EmpowHER Biz – Sapno Ki Udaan Initiative:

This program is designed to provide women with essential skills and support to succeed in **retail** entrepreneurship.

i.The initiative is open to women from Delhi- National Capital Region (NCR), Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh (UP) , Haryana, Madhya Pradesh (MP), and Gujarat, ensuring support across these states.

ii.Fifty women, aged between **18 and 35 years**, will be selected through an online application process.

- Among them, the top 20 participants will receive a **full waiver on New Shop franchise fees**, enabling them to establish their ventures with greater ease.

iii.The initiative will offer expert mentorship to participants, along with training in retail management, financial literacy, digital tools, and business development, aiming to enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities.

iv.Through this partnership, New Shop aims to assist **10,000 entrepreneurs by 2030**, enhancing its franchising model to provide opportunities and support for first-time entrepreneurs across India.

About Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP):

The WEP is an initiative of NITI Aayog, launched in **2018** as an online platform.

- It became a Public-Private Partnership(**PPP**) in **2022** and now collaborates with over 30 partners from both the public and private sectors to develop programs that support and empower women entrepreneurs.
- Since 2023, WEP's 'Award to Reward' initiative offers a flexible framework for stakeholders to design and implement impactful programs.

ICAR Launches Kisan Samridhhi Portal to Promote Efficient Agricultural Marketing

In January 2025, **Dr. Himanshu Pathak**, Director General (DG) of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and Secretary of the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW), launched the '**Kisan Samridhhi Market Portal**' and the **Kisan Samridhhi trademark** at the ICAR-Central Plantation Crops Research Institute (CPCRI) in Kasaragod, Kerala.

- The launch took place during the **109th Foundation Day** celebrations of **ICAR-CPCRI**, as part of the inaugural session of the National Seminar on 'Harnessing the Plantation Sector for Sustainable Development Goals' and an exhibition.

i.The portal was developed by ICAR's Agricultural Technology Application Research Institute (**ATARI**), based in Bengaluru, Karnataka and is managed by ICAR's Krishi Vigyan Kendra (**KVK**), based in Pathanamthitta, Kerala.

ii.The portal, operating in Karnataka, Kerala and Lakshadweep, connects farmers, agri-entrepreneurs, and consumers for direct online sales of agricultural products, promoting transparency.

iii.The portal aims to create a Digital Vyapar Network (**DIVYAN**) to promote efficient agricultural marketing, and it is scalable to connect all KVKs across the 11 ICAR-ATARI centers in India.

Note: ICAR-ATARI has registered the **Kisan Samridhhi trademark** for over **150 products** across five categories. A mobile application (app) for easy access is also under pilot testing and will be launched soon.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Henley Passport Index 2025: Singapore Reclaimed Title of World's Most Powerful Passport; India Ranked 85th

On January 08 2025, London (the United Kingdom, UK)-based Henley & Partners released the annual edition of [Henley Passport Index 2025](#). As per the index, **Singapore** has reclaimed its title as the world's most powerful passport with visa-free access to **195** out of **227 destinations** worldwide, followed by **Japan** which secured 2nd rank with visa-free access to 193 destinations.

- India's rank dropped from 80th spot (in 2024) **to 85th spot (in 2025)** on the list, with visa-free access to only 57 destinations of the world, down from 62 visa-free destinations in 2024.

ii.As per the index, several member states of the European Union (EU): France, Germany, Italy and Spain witnessed a decline in their ranking from 2nd position (in 2024) to 3rd spot (in 2025).

- These EU countries are ranked along with Finland and South Korea, with access to 192 destinations with no prior visa required.

ii.The index was originally created by Dr. Christian H. Kaelin, compares 199 passports and 227 travel destinations annually for the last 19 years. Countries are ranked based on visa-free entry to citizens holding that country's passport.

About Henley & Partners:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Dr. Juerg Steffen

Headquarters- London, United Kingdom (UK)

Established- 1997

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- India shared its latest rank with two countries: Niger and Equatorial Guinea.

About Henley Passport Index:

i. The index was originally created by **Dr. Christian H. Kaelin**, compares 199 passports and 227 travel destinations annually for the last 19 years. Countries are ranked based on visa-free entry to citizens holding that country's passport.

ii. The ranking is based on exclusive Timatic data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which maintains the world's largest and most accurate database of travel information.

Note: Timatic is a leading provider of real-time information on travel document requirements for international air travel.

List of Top 3 & Bottom 3 Countries:

Top 3 Countries		
Rank	Name of the Countries	Visa-Free Access to Destinations
1	Singapore	195
2	Japan	193
3	France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Finland and South Korea	192
India Rank		
85	India, Equatorial Guinea and Niger	57
Bottom 3 Countries		
106	Afghanistan	26
105	Syria	27
104	Iraq	31

Key Highlights:

i.As per the index, several member states of the European Union (EU): France, Germany, Italy and Spain witnessed a decline in their ranking from 2nd position (in 2024) to 3rd spot (in 2025).

- These EU countries are ranked along with Finland and South Korea, with access to 192 destinations with no prior visa required.

ii.7 countries from EU i.e. Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden shared **4th** position on the list. All these 7 countries have visa-free access to 191 destinations.

iii.The **5th** spot on the list is shared by 5 countries: Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand, all these countries offer visa-free travel to 190 destinations.

iv.The remaining top 10 countries on the index is largely dominated by European countries, except to Australia (6th spot with 189 destinations), Canada (7th spot with 188 destinations), the United States of America (USA) (9th spot with 186 destinations) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (10th spot with 185 destinations).

v.**Afghanistan** secured **106th** spot on the list and has the world's weakest passport with visa-free access to only 26 destinations globally.

- It is followed by Syria (105th spot with 27 destinations), Iraq (104th with 31 destinations), Pakistan and Yemen (jointly ranked at 103th spot with 33 destinations).

Biggest Fallers and Climbers on the List:

i.The index showed that only 22 of the world's 199 passports have witnessed a drop in their ranking in the last 10 years.

ii.Top 5 countries with biggest fall in their ranking between 2015 and 2025:

Venezuela (from 30th spot to 45th spot), the USA (from 2nd spot to 9th spot) Vanuatu (from 48th spot to 54th spot), the UK (from 1st spot to 5th spot) and Canada (from 4th spot to 7th spot).

iii.As per the index, the UAE emerged as one of the biggest climbers on the index over the last 10 years, and secured access to an additional 72 destinations since 2015. Thus, the ranking of UAE jumped by 32 places to 10th spot.

iv.While, China also witnessed significant jump in its ranking from 94th (2015) to 60th (2025).

WEF Future of Jobs Report 2025:78 Million New Job Opportunities by 2030

On January 7, 2025, the World Economic Forum (WEF) published its **5th edition** of "[Future of Jobs Report 2025 – Insights Report January 2025,](#)" revealing that job disruption will equate to **22%** of jobs by 2030 globally. This transformation is driven by technological advancements, demographic changes, economic pressures, and geopolitical tensions.

- The report forecasts the creation of **170 million** new jobs and the displacement of **92 million**, leading to a net increase of 78 million jobs.
- This analysis is based on the perspectives of over 1,000 global employers, representing more than **14 million workers** from 55 economies.
- The report highlights key macrotrends shaping jobs and skills and discusses the workforce transformation strategies that companies will adopt from 2025 to 2030.

About World Economic Forum (WEF):

President and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Børge Brende

Headquarters- Cologny, Geneva, Switzerland

Established – 1971

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- The report highlights key macrotrends shaping jobs and skills and discusses the workforce transformation strategies that companies will adopt from 2025 to 2030.

Skill Demand and the Need for Reskilling:

By 2030, around **40%** of existing skills are expected to become outdated. Employers recognize that skill gaps are a major barrier to business transformation, with **63%** of employers identifying this issue.

- According to the report, if the global workforce were composed of 100 people, 59 would need training by 2030.
- However, **11 of these workers** are unlikely to receive the necessary training, putting them at risk of redundancy.
- To meet the demand for emerging roles, 85% of employers plan to prioritize workforce upskilling, with 70% seeking talent with new skills.

Highlights of the Report:

i. Broadening Digital Access: By 2030, **60%** of employers expect expanding digital access to transform their businesses.

- This trend, coupled with advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), information processing, and robotics, will drive the creation of new roles and change existing job functions.
- AI and big data is expected to be the leading catalyst for these shifts.

ii. Impact of Advancing Technologies: AI and robotics are among the top technologies anticipated to be transformative.

- **86%** of employers foresee AI and information processing to have a profound impact, followed by **58%** anticipating the influence of robotics and automation.
- Additionally, **41%** of employers expect advancements in energy generation, storage, and distribution to drive transformations.

iii.Economic Shifts: The rising cost of living is the 2nd-most transformative trend, with **50%** of employers expecting it to reshape businesses by 2030.

- The global inflation is expected to decrease, the general economic slowdown will continue to affect **42%** of businesses.
- These economic factors are predicted to displace **1.6 million jobs** globally, while also driving demand for roles requiring creative thinking, resilience, and agility.
- Employers are expected to face job displacement globally, with an estimated 92 million jobs being lost by 2030, despite an expected **7% net growth** in total employment, creating 78 million new jobs.

iv.Climate Change Mitigation: Climate-related trends are the 3rd-most transformative trends that are expected to drive demand for roles in renewable energy, environmental engineering, and electric vehicles.

- These roles are expected to grow alongside climate change adaptation, with **47%** of employers expecting it to transform their businesses in the next **5 years**.

Fastest Growing and Declining Roles:

i.Fastest Growing Jobs:

- Frontline job roles include Farmworkers, Delivery Drivers, Construction Workers, Salespersons, and Food Processing Workers.
- Technology-related roles such as Big Data Specialists, FinTech Engineers, AI & Machine Learning Specialists, and Software Developers.
- Green transition jobs like Autonomous & Electric Vehicle Specialists, Environmental Engineers and Renewable Energy Engineers.
- Care economy jobs, such as Nursing Professionals and Social Work roles, will grow as populations age.

ii. Fastest Declining Jobs:

- Clerical and secretarial roles, including Cashiers and Ticket Clerks, Administrative Assistants and Executive Secretaries are expected to see the largest decline in absolute numbers.
- Similarly, businesses expect the fastest-declining roles to include Postal Service Clerks, Bank Tellers and Data Entry Clerks.

About World Economic Forum (WEF):

President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)– Børge Brende

Headquarters– Cologny, Geneva, Switzerland

Established – 1971

BANKING & FINANCE

KredX Receives RBI Approval to Operate as TReDS Platform

On 9 January, 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based **KredX**, India's largest supply chain finance platform, received approval from the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) to operate as a Trade Receivables Discounting System (**TReDS**) platform.

- The new business will operate under the brand name **DTX (Domestic Trade Exchange)**.

Note: KredX is now the **fifth** company to receive this license after Receivables Exchange of India (RXIL), M1 Exchange, Invoice Mart, and C2FO (Collaborative Cash Flow Optimization) Factoring Solutions.

About Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) platform:

TReDS platform launched in 2018 operate under the regulatory framework of the RBI, governed by the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007 (PSS Act).

- It helps Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) access credit by selling their receivables (bills of exchange, also called factoring units) to financiers, including banks, government departments, and public sector undertakings (PSUs).

Eligibility:

- i. To set up a TReDS platform, companies are required to have a **minimum** paid-up equity capital of Rs 25 crore.
- ii. Businesses with a turnover of **Rs 250 crore or more** are **mandatory** required to register on the TReDS platform.
- iii. Additionally, **sellers** are mandatory required to have been in operation for **more than a year** to participate.

Process:

- i. On the TReDS platform, the process begins when the **seller uploads an invoice**, which is listed as a Factoring Unit (FU). Buyers, review and approve the FU, making it available for financiers to bid.
- ii. The seller chooses the most favorable bid and receives an advance payment, typically **80-90%** of the invoice value.
- iii. On the due date, the buyer settles the full invoice amount directly with the financier, ensuring timely payments and improved cash flow for the seller.

Point to Note: TReDS transaction volumes are expected to grow significantly, increasing from approximately USD 30 billion annually in January 2025 to around USD 50 billion annually by 2026.

RBI Introduced New 15-Day Credit Reporting Rule Effective from January 1, 2025

The Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) has introduced new credit reporting rule. It has mandated that all lenders must update credit bureau records **every 15 days** instead of previous monthly cycle. This direction came into effect from **January 01, 2025**.

- This new change aims to enhance credit score accuracy and ensure timely reflection of financial activities of borrowers.
- This direction was previously issued by the RBI in August 2024, allows lenders and credit bureaus to transition to 15-day cycle to upgrade their systems and processes.

Key Impact on Borrowers and Lenders:

i. Halting loan 'evergreening': The new rule will help to curb loan 'evergreening', where borrower take new loan to repay old loan, creating an unsustainable debt cycle. The new rule enable the lender to detect such cases sooner, reducing financial risk for both financial institutions and borrowers.

ii. Faster Updating of Credit Scores: Earlier, under the monthly reporting system, missed payments or defaults could take up **40 days** to appear on credit report of borrower. The new 15-day reporting cycle will significantly reduce these delays and will enable the lenders to have access to more accurate and timely data.

Key Benefits:

i. Timely Update of Credit Score: The new 15-day reporting cycle will ensure that consumers credit histories are kept updated. For borrowers who pay their installments on regular basis, could help in improving their credit scores.

ii. Enhanced Credit Access: More accurate credit scoring will enable the faster access to loans for consumers with responsible repayment habits, thus making it easier for consumers to secure credit when required.

iii. Consumer Empowerment: This new change will help borrowers to have better understanding of their financial well-being, as changes in their credit scores will be promptly reflected.

iv. Improved Risk Management for Lenders: Regular updates will help the lenders in managing risk effectively by providing information of borrower's financial actions and will help in reducing default rates.

WhiteOak Capital MF Unveils India's 1st Actively Managed Quality Factor Theme Fund

On January 8, 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **WhiteOak Capital Mutual Fund** (MF) introduced the WhiteOak Capital Quality Equity Fund, an open-ended equity scheme on the Quality Factor theme, through its new fund offer (**NFO**).

- This is India's first actively managed fund based on the Quality Factor theme. It focuses on companies with robust fundamentals that demonstrate the potential for consistent earnings and resilience to economic stress.
- Investors can subscribe to the NFO starting January 8, 2025, with the offer closing on January 22, 2025

About WhiteOak Capital Quality Equity Fund:

i. Minimum Investment Amount:

- **For Lumpsum Purchase:** Minimum of **Rs. 500**, with additional investments in multiples of Re. 1 thereafter.
- **For Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) Purchase:** Minimum of **Rs. 100** on a Weekly, Fortnightly, and Monthly basis, with additional investments in multiples of Re. 1 thereafter, with a minimum of six-month installments.

ii. Asset Allocation Pattern:

- Equity and equity-related instruments of companies that align with the quality factor theme – 80% to 100%.
- Equity and equity-related instruments of companies not adhering to the quality factor theme- 0% to 20%.
- Debt securities and money market instruments (MMI) – 0% to 20%.
- Units issued by Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InVITs) – 0 to 10%.

iii.The scheme will use the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) Quality TRI (Total Return Index) as its benchmark. It will be managed by **Ramesh Mantri** (Equity), Chief Investment Officer (CIO) of WhiteOak Capital Asset Management Limited.

About New Fund Offer (NFO):

i.A New Fund Offer (NFO) launched by an asset management company (AMC) to introduce a new mutual fund.This process is similar to initial public offering (IPO).

ii.During the 10 to 15-day subscription period, investors can buy units of the fund at a fixed price, generally set at Rs. 10 per unit.

iii.Once the NFO concludes, the fund gets listed on the stock market, and its value fluctuates according to its net asset value (NAV)

About WhiteOak Capital Mutual Fund (MF):

WhiteOak Capital Mutual Fund, established in June **2017** by Prashant Khemka, operates under the White Oak Capital Group

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Managing Director (**MD**) and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Aashish P Somaiyaa

Exim Bank raised USD 1 Billion through 10-year Bonds

In January 2025, Mumbai-based **Export-Import Bank of India**(EXIM Bank) ,also known as India Exim Bank , has raised United States Dollar (**USD**) **1 billion** (Rs. 8,570 crores) through 10-year bonds in the international market, achieving the lowest-ever spread of 100 basis points(bps) over 10-year United States (US) Treasury securities.

- The milestone makes EXIM Bank the **first** Indian organisation to issue dollar bonds in 2025, representing a significant achievement for Indian issuers in international capital markets.

i.The bank will utilise the funds to finance its ongoing and future projects worldwide.

ii.The amount was raised in the **144A/Reg-S format** under Rule 144A which allows Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) to trade debt securities without needing registration or review by the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

iii.Bank of America Securities (BofA Securities), Citigroup, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), J.P. Morgan Chase, and Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) served as the main managers and book runners for the bond offering.

Note: India Exim Bank, established in **1982**, has been rated as Baa3 (Stable) by Moody's Investors Service, BBB- (Positive) by Standard & Poor's (S&P), and BBB- (Stable) by Fitch Ratings.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Mumbai's CSMIA becomes India's 1st Airport to Receive Level 5 Accreditation from ACI

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (**CSMIA**) which is operated by Adani Airports Holding Limited (AAHL), a subsidiary of Adani Group, has become **India's 1st** and **world's 3rd airport** to receive the prestigious **Level 5** Accreditation which is the highest distinction awarded from the Airports Council International (**ACI**) for exemplary customer experience standards.

- This recognition consolidates CSMIA position as leader in passenger service and operational excellence.

About ACI Level 5 Accreditation:

- i. It is the **highest** recognition in the Airport Customer Experience Accreditation Programme.
- ii. The accreditation is awarded based on rigorous evolution criteria, including customer feedback, service quality, and airport operations. Thus, creating a 360-degree framework for customer service excellence.

Key Initiatives of CSMIA:

- i. CSMIA has established new standards of excellence through its various innovative initiatives in infrastructure, technology, and services like:
 - Aviiio application (app) which was launched in September 2024 by AAHL. It is designed to provide access to real-time data to passengers in seven airports in India including CSMIA.
- ii. Pawfect programme, is one of the significant initiatives of CSMIA, which includes 9 comfort dogs stationed at Terminal 2 Departures, to further enhance the passenger experience.
- iii. It has expanded its digital gateway programme by increasing the number of e-gates from 24 to 68 (highest in India).

About Airports Council International (ACI):

It is the association of the world's airports, representing the collective interests of airports worldwide to promote excellence in the aviation industry.

Director General (**DG**)- Justin Erbacci

Headquarters- Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Established- 1991

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

V Narayanan appointed as 11th Chairman of ISRO

On January 07 2025, the Government of India (GoI) appointed **V Narayanan** as the **11th chairman** of the Indian Space Research Organisation(**ISRO**) and **Secretary** of the Department of Space(**DoS**). His tenure starts on January 14, 2025, for a period of **2 years** by replacing incumbent **Sreedhara Panicker Somanath**.

- The appointment was approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) and was notified by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions (MoPP&P).
- Currently V Narayanan serves as the **Director** of the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (**LPSC**), Valiamala, Kerala.
- He will also be the Chairman of the Space Commission, playing a key role in India's development of the cryogenic engine.

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About V Narayanan:

i. V Narayanan completed his graduation in Cryogenic Engineering in 1989 at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur , West Bengal (WB) and earned a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in Aerospace Engineering in 2001.

- He was a distinguished scientist (APEX Scale) who gained 40 years of experience in rocket and spacecraft propulsion.

ii. He worked for Tube Investments (TI) of India Diamond Chain Limited (Tamil Nadu TN), Madras Rubber Factory (Chennai, TN), Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) in Trichy (TN) and Ranipet (TN).

iii. In 1984, he started his career at ISRO in the Solid Propulsion area of Sounding Rockets and Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV) and Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala).

iv. In 2018, he served as the Director of LPSC in Thiruvananthapuram, with a unit in Bengaluru (Karnataka).

v. He served as the Project Director for the C25 Cryogenic Project of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) Mk II and III.

- Under his guidance, the LPSC delivered **183** Liquid Propulsion Systems and Control Power plants for various ISRO missions.

vi. He chairs the Programme Management Council Space Transportation Systems (**PMC-STs**), which makes decisions in all launch vehicle projects.

vii. He also heads the National Level Human Rated Certification Board (**HRCB**) for 'Gaganyaan', India's planned human spaceflight mission.

Awards and Honors:

i.He received the 'ASI Award' for Rocket and Related Technologies and a Gold Medal from the Astronautical Society of India **(ASI)**.

ii.He also received the National Aeronautical Prize by the Aeronautical Society of India (AeSI).

ii.He has won several ISRO awards, including the Outstanding Achievement Award, Team Excellence Award, the High Energy Materials Society of India's Team Award for his contributions in aerospace.

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO):

ISRO is one of the **six** largest space agencies in the world.

Chairman- Sreedhara Panicker Somanath(Till January 14, 2025)

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

Establishment- 1969

MoF Appoints C S Setty, Uday Kotak as Governing Council Members of NIIFTL

In January 2025, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) appointed **Challa Sreenivasalu Setty**, Chairman of State Bank of India (SBI) and **Uday Kotak**, Founder and Director of Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited (KMBL) as the governing council **member** of the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Trustee Limited (**NIIFTL**), which provides strategic guidance on a number of matters including investment of the corpus of NIIF.

- C S Setty replaced **Dinesh Khara**, former Chairman of SBI, while Uday Kotak replaced **T V Mohandas Pai**, Chairman of Bangalore (Karnataka) based Aarin Capital.
- According to the circular issued by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), MoF, the nomination was approved by **Nirmala Sitharaman**, the chairperson of the Governing Council.

About National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited (NIIFL):

i. NIIFL, an Indian Public Sector Company, was established in December 2015 with the goal of boosting infrastructure financing by investing in new (greenfield), existing (brownfield), and stalled projects.

ii. NIIFTL was established to serve as an advisory council to NIIF, offering strategic guidance on matters such as the investment of NIIFL's corpus.

iii. NIIFTL is a six member council chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

- The other members of the council include **Ajay Seth**, Secretary of the DEA; **M. Nagaraju**, Secretary of the Department of Financial Services (DFS), MoF; and **Hemendra Kothari**, Chairman of the Mumbai-based DSP Mutual Fund.

Former shot putter Bahadur Singh Sagoo Appointed as President of AFI

On January 7 2025, former Indian athlete and Asian Games Gold Medalist **Bahadur Singh Sagoo** was appointed as the **President** of the Athletics Federation of India (**AFI**) for a period of four years, during the Annual General Assembly Meeting of the AFI in Chandigarh, Punjab.

- He will replace **Adille Sumariwalla** , who served as the AFI president for three consecutive terms from 2012.
- **Stanely Jones** from Telangana was appointed as the new treasurer and former middle-distance runner **Jyotirmoyee Sikdar** as the joint secretary of the AFI.

i.He is a one-time Asian Games gold medalist and a two-time national champion in shot put.

ii.He won the gold medal at the **2002 Asian Games** in Busan, South Korea with a throw of 19.03 meters. He also represented India at the Olympics in 2000 and 2004.

iii.In 2004, his career-best throw of 20.40 meters(m) was recorded at the Koncha-Zaspa Sinitskoha Memorial in Kyiv, Ukraine.

iv.In 2006, he was honoured with the **Padma Shri**, the fourth-highest civilian honour for his contributions to sports.

Note: AFI was established in **1946** in New Delhi, Delhi. It is the national governing body for the sport of athletics in India and is responsible for organising competitions across India.

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

GoI Approved Suzuki Motor Corporation to Acquire 26% Stake in NDDB Mirda Ltd

In January 2025, the Government of India (GoI) has granted approval to **Suzuki Motor Corporation**, headquartered in Shizuoka, Japan, to **acquire a 26% stake** in **NDDB** (National Dairy Development Board) **Mirda Limited**, a bio-gas venture of the NDDB, headquartered in Anand, Gujarat.

- Suzuki Research and Development (R&D) Center India Private Limited, a subsidiary of Suzuki Motor Corporation, signed an agreement with NDDB to invest in NDDB Mirda Limited.
- The total investment for this acquisition is **Rs 34 crore**. Suzuki will initially invest Rs 8.84 crore, with the remaining Rs 25.16 crore to be invested later.

i.This collaboration is part of Suzuki's strategy to use Compressed Bio-Gas (**CBG**) to enhance vehicle sustainability and performance.

ii.The deal also allows Suzuki to gradually increase its equity to 49%.

Note: In 2023 an agreement was signed between Suzuki, Banas Dairy, and NDDB plans to set up **four dung-based CBG plants** in Banaskantha district of Gujarat, with NDDB constructing the plants, Banas Dairy operating them, and Suzuki providing the funding.

OBITUARY

Renowned Writer-filmmaker and Padma Shri Awardee Pritish Nandy passed away

On January 8 2025, Renowned Writer-filmmaker and Padma Shri Awardee **Pritish Nandy** passed away at the age of **73** in Mumbai (Maharashtra). He was born on 15 January 1951 in Bhagalpur, Bihar.

- Pritish Nandy has received numerous awards including the '**Padma Shri**' award.

About Pritish Nandy:

i.Pritish Nandy was a versatile writer, journalist, poet, filmmaker, and animal rights activist.

- He began his career as a writer, published his 1st poetry collection, 'Of Gods and Olives', in 1967.

ii.Over the years, he published over **40 volumes** of poetry and translated works from Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi, and Sanskrit into English.

iii.In the 1980s, he became the **Publishing Director** of 'The Times of India Group' (Bennett Coleman & Co-Limited). He served as the Editor of prominent publications, including 'The Illustrated Weekly of India', 'The Independent', and 'Filmfare'.

iv.In 1990, he made substantial contributions to Indian cinema through his production company, creating hit films such as Sur (2002), Kaante (2002), Chameli (2003), Jhankaar Beats (2003), Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi (2005) and Pyaar Ke Side Effects (2006).

- He was the founder of Pritish Nandy Communications Limited (**PNC**), the media and entertainment company.

v.In 1992, he founded People for Animals (**PFA**), India's 1st animal rights non-governmental organisation (NGO).

- He represented Maharashtra in the Rajya Sabha as a **Shiv Sena** member from 1998 to 2004.

vi.In 1996, he opened India's **1st cyber café** at Hotel Leela Kempinski, Mumbai and in 2010, his web series 'Four More Shots Please!' was nominated for an Emmy Award.

Awards and Honors:

i.In 1997, he received the '**Padma Shri**' India's 4th highest civilian award at the age of 26 for his exceptional contributions to Indian literature.

iii.In 2008, he received the '**KarmaVeer Puraskaar (KVP)**' for his outstanding contributions to the NGO's.

iv.In 2012, he was awarded '**International Humanitarian Award**' at the Genesis Awards from the Humane Society of the United States of America (USA) for his contributions to the film industry.

- He also received the 'Friends of Liberation War Honour' and the EM Forster Literary Award and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO) Asia Pacific Heritage Award.

11th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Overview of PM Narendra Modi's visit to AP and Odisha on 8th-9th January, 2025

Prime Minister (PM) **Narendra Modi** visited Andhra Pradesh(**AP**) and **Odisha** from **8th January to 9th January 2025** to launch various projects worth over Rs 2 lakh crore to promote sustainable development, industrial growth, and infrastructure enhancement.

The various projects include,

- Laid the foundation stone and inaugurated various railway and road projects worth over Rs.19,500 crore in AP.
- First Green Hydrogen Hub under National Green Hydrogen Mission(NGHM) launched in Pudimadaka, AP.
- 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas(PBD) convention inaugurated in and remotely flagged-off the inaugural journey of the Pravasi Bharatiya Express in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

About Andhra Pradesh(AP):

Chief Minister(**CM**)– Nara Chandrababu Naidu

Governor– Syed Abdul Nazeer

Capital– Amaravati

Tiger Reserve – Nagarjunsagar-Srisaïlam Tiger Reserve

About Odisha:

Chief Minister(**CM**)– Mohan Charan Majhi

Governor– Hari Babu Kambhampati

Capital– Bhubaneswar

Tiger Reserve – Similipal Tiger Reserve, Satkosia Tiger Reserve

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PM Narendra Modi's visit to AP:

Development works worth over Rs. 2 Lakh Crore launched in Visakhapatnam:

On January 8 2025, PM Modi laid the foundation stone and inaugurated various railway and road projects worth over **Rs.19,500 crore** in AP.

i.He laid the foundation stone for South Coast Railway Headquarters at Visakhapatnam with an aim to promote agriculture, trade, tourism, and regional economic activity.

ii.The foundation stone was also laid for a **Bulk Drug Park** in **Anakapalli** district to boost economic activity.

- It will support economic activity through its proximity to the Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor and other industrial regions.

iii.The Foundation Stone of Krishnapatnam Industrial Area (KRIS City) under Chennai Bengaluru Industrial Corridor was laid in Tirupati District of AP.

- The project is estimated to gather investments of approximately **Rs.10,500 crore** and connect with other industrial corridors to strengthen regional growth.

First Green Hydrogen Hub under NGHM launched:

On 8th January 2025, PM Modi laid the foundation stone of the NTPC Green Energy Limited **(NGEL) Green Hydrogen Hub** project in Pudimadaka, Anakapalli district, AP.

- It is the **first** Green Hydrogen Hub under the NGHM. The estimated cost of the project will be **Rs.1.85 lakh crore**.

ii.The project will be jointly developed by **NGEL** and the New & Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NREDCAP).

iii.It will include the development of 20 Gigawatt(GW) of Renewable Energy(RE) projects, production of 1,500 tonnes per day(TPD) of green hydrogen and 7,500 TPD of green hydrogen derivatives such as green methanol, green urea, and sustainable aviation fuel primarily for export markets.

iv.The project will contribute substantially in achieving India's non-fossil energy capacity target of **500 GW by 2030**.

Note : The Union Cabinet launched the NGHM in 2023 with an outlay of Rs.19,744 crore from Financial Year (FY) 2023-24 to FY 2029-30 to make India a global hub for production, usage and export of Green Hydrogen and its derivatives.

PM Narendra Modi's visit to Odisha:

18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas(PBD) convention inaugurated:

On 9th January 2025, PM Modi inaugurated the **18th** PBD Convention in **Bhubaneswar**, Odisha.

i.It is organized by the Government of India(GoI) in collaboration with the Odisha Government.

- The theme of the event is 'Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat'.

PM flags off inaugural journey of the Pravasi Bharatiya Express:

On 9th January 2025, PM Modi inaugurated the **Pravasi Bharatiya Express**, a special tourist train which will start its journey from Nizamuddin Railway Station in New Delhi(Delhi).

i.The train has been developed for Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) aged between **45** and **65 years** and belonging to low-income categories.

ii.It has been introduced by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in collaboration with the Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC).

iii.The train will cover multiple destinations of religious and tourist importance, including Ayodhya, Patna, Gaya, Varanasi, Mahabalipuram, Rameshwaram, Madurai, Kochi, Goa, Ekta Nagar (Kevadia), Ajmer, Pushkar and Agra under the 'Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojana.'

About Andhra Pradesh(AP):

Chief Minister(**CM**)– Nara Chandrababu Naidu

Governor– Syed Abdul Nazeer

Capital– Amaravati

Tiger Reserve – Nagarjunsagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve

About Odisha:

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Governor– Hari Babu Kambhampati

Capital– Bhubaneswar

Tiger Reserve – Similipal Tiger Reserve, Satkosia Tiger Reserve

UJALA Scheme and SNLP Programme Completed 10 Years of Energy –Efficient Lighting

On January 05 2025, the Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) for All **(UJALA)** scheme, a transformative initiative of Government of India (GoI) in energy efficiency and Street Lighting National Programme **(SNLP)** have completed **10 years** of successful implementation.

- Both programmes were launched by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on 5th January, 2015.
- The scheme is being implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited **(EESL)** under the Ministry of Power **(MoP)**.

i.It was originally introduced as the Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme **(DELP)**, and later rebranded as UJALA. It aimed at providing affordable energy-efficient LED bulbs, tube lights, and fans to millions of Indian homes.

ii.As of January 06 2025, **36.87 crore** LED bulbs have been distributed under the scheme, resulting in Rs 19,153 crore annually in electrical savings.

iii.As of January 06 2025, more than 1.34 crore LED streetlights have been installed across ULBs and GPs in the country under SNLP programme.

About Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL):

It is a joint venture company of 4 power sector Public Sector Units (PSUs): NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation Limited, and POWERGRID Corporation of India Limited.

Chairman- K.S. Sundaram

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2009

About Ministry of Power (MoP):

Union Minister- Manohar Lal Khattar (Constituency- Karnal, Haryana)

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- Both programmes were launched by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on 5th January, 2015.
- The UJALA scheme is being implemented by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (**EESL**) under the Ministry of Power (**MoP**).

About UJALA Scheme:

i.It was originally introduced as the Domestic Efficient Lighting Programme (**DELP**), and later rebranded as UJALA. It aimed at providing affordable energy-efficient LED bulbs, tube lights, and fans to millions of Indian homes.

ii.Over the last 10 years, UJALA has emerged as the world's largest zero-subsidy domestic lighting programme, exemplifying India's commitment to reducing energy consumption, enhancing environmental awareness, and promoting economic efficiency.

Significance of LED bulbs Compared to ICL and CFL:

i.LED bulbs helps in saving nearly **90%** of energy compared to Incandescent Lamps (**ICLs**) and 50% in the case of Compact Fluorescent Lamps (**CFLs**).

ii.LED bulbs consumes less energy compared to ICLs and CFLs, for example: 1 LED bulb consumes only 1 unit of electricity when operated for 140 hours (hrs) whereas a CFL and ICL consume 2 units and 9 units respectively for the same time period.

iii.The scheme offers LED bulbs at reduced rates of **Rs 70 per bulb** compared to **Rs 450 to Rs 500 per bulb (2014)**, has further helped in reducing household consumption and contributed to environmental sustainability.

iv.The annual cost ownership of LEDs stands at Rs 12, which is less than 33% of a CFL (Rs 40) and merely 10% of an ICL (Rs 108).

Key Accomplishments of UJALA Scheme:

- i.**As of January 06 2025, **36.87 crore** LED bulbs have been distributed under the scheme, resulting in Rs 19,153 crore annually in electrical savings.
- ii.**So far, **407.92 crore** LED bulbs have been sold across the Indian market under the UJALA scheme.
- iii.**The peak demand of **9,586 MegaWatt (MW)** of electricity has been avoided.
- iv.**It also helped in reducing the Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 3.87 crore tonnes annually.
- v.**So far, 47,883 million (approximately 48 billion) kilowatt-hour (kWh) energy has been saved annually.

About Street Lighting National Programme (SNLP):

- i.**It was introduced as part of Government of India (GoI)'s commitment to environmental protection and sustainable development.
 - **Aim:** To reduce energy consumption and operational costs for public lighting by replacing conventional street lamps with LED lights in urban and rural areas.
- ii.**The programme is being implemented by EESL. It has collaborated with governing bodies like: Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), Municipal bodies, Gram Panchayats (GPs) and both central and state governments for the implementation of programme.
- iii.**The programme operates a unique business model where EESL funds the projects upfront and recoups costs through annuity payments made by municipalities.
 - It also ensures the maintenance of the LED streetlights, providing more than 95% uptime.

Key Accomplishments of SNLP:

i.As of January 06 2025, more than 1.34 crore LED streetlights have been installed across ULBs and GPs in the country.

ii.The installation of LED streetlights led to significant energy savings of over 9,001 Million Units (MU)of electricity annually.

iii.Reduction in peak demand by over 1,500 MW and a decrease in CO2 emissions by 6.2 million tonnes annually.

About Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL):

It is a joint venture company of 4 power sector Public Sector Units (PSUs): NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation Limited, and POWERGRID Corporation of India Limited.

Chairman- K.S. Sundaram

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2009

About Ministry of Power (MoP):

Union Minister- Manohar Lal Khattar (Constituency- Karnal, Haryana)

Union Minister Piyush Goyal Launched 8th Edition of NPOP in New Delhi

On January 09 2025, Union Minister **Piyush Goyal**, Ministry of Commerce & Industry (**MoC&I**) launched the **8th** edition of National Programme for Organic Production (**NPOP**) at the Bharat Ratna C. Subramaniam Auditorium, National Agricultural Science Complex (NASC), Pusa in New Delhi (Delhi). The event was organized by the Agricultural & Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

- During the event, he unveiled NPOP portal, TraceNet2.0, Organic Promotion Portal, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) portal and AgriXchange portal.
- He also distributed the 1st 5 registration certificates generated on newly launched, TraceNet2.0 to organic operators during the event.
- While addressing the event, the Union Minister highlighted that the total export value of organic farming in India has the potential to reach **Rs 2,000 crore** in the next 3 years.

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I):

Union Minister- Piyush Goyal (Constituency- Mumbai North, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (MoS)- Jitin Prasada (Constituency- Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

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Key Dignitaries:

i. Union Minister of State (MoS) Jitin Prasada, MoC&I; Union MoS Murlidhar Mohol, Ministry of Cooperation (MoC); Dr. Ashish Kumar Bhutani, Secretary of MoC and other senior government officials were present at the event.

ii. Representatives from major trading partners like: the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU), Australia, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

iii. Industry Leaders from international organisations like: Rome (Italy)-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Bonn (Germany)-based International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), and Germany-based Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL).

About NPOP:

i. NPOP was launched in May 2001, since then, it has undergone various revisions. The last revision of NPOP was made in 2014.

ii. The standards set by NPOP for crop production have been recognised by the European Commission (EC), Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK).

iii. The implementation of NPOP is being monitored by APEDA, the apex body under MoC&I.

Key Features of 8th NPOP:

i.The 8th edition of NPOP has introduced key amendments, which aimed to promote ease of operations and enhance transparency for stakeholders, including farmers.

- **Key Target:** The programme aims to strengthen India's organic export sector, with an ambitious target of reaching **USD 2 billion** in organic food exports by **2030**.
- Currently, India exports organic produce worth Rs 5,000- Rs 6,000 crore annually.

ii.The Certification process required for organic grower groups has been simplified and these groups are now granted legal status in place of the Internal Control System (ICS).

- The revised derogation provisions allow for a potential reduction of **up to 3 years** in the land conversion period to organic farm, subject to conditions and safeguards.

ii.Transparency is improved through the disclosure of information about organic farmers and other relevant information in the public domain, strengthening system credibility.

iii.Also, oversight mechanisms have been bolstered with the integration of Information Technology (IT) tools and the web-based traceability system, Tracenet, for monitoring, surveillance, and data analytics.

iv.The revised NPOP includes provisions for reduced conversion time from non-organic to organic farming and offers flexibility for farmers to switch service providers or production groups, ensuring they receive fair compensation.

Key Portals Unveiled at 8th NPOP:

i.NPOP portal: This portal is designed to provide more visibility and ease of operations for Organic stakeholders.

ii.Organic Promotion Portal: Through this portal, farmers, FPOs and exporters can demonstrate their certified organic products, generate Trade Leads and connect with international buyers.

- The portal will also feature online training and capacity building sessions for operators on Organic Production and also information on Organic Trade events.

iii.TraceNet 2.0: It is the upgraded online organic traceability system for seamless operations and improved tools for regulatory oversight.

- It will ensure transparency, traceability, and adherence for organic agricultural and processed food products from farm to market.
- This new version of TraceNet, which has integrated technology with agriculture, will empower the stakeholders to streamline operations and meet international organic certification standards.

iv.Redesigned APEDA portal: It is the redesigned and revamped version of APEDA portal with enhanced user experience and information for the benefit of Agric and Processed food products' stakeholders.

v.AgriXchange portal: It is the redesigned and revamped version of APEDA portal , which will enable more user-friendly data analysis and generation of reports and data of Agricultural exports, thus making it accessible for the general public.

- This portal will enable the exporters to easily connect with global buyers and sellers as well as explore comprehensive trade insights at their convenience.

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I):

Union Minister- Piyush Goyal (Constituency- Mumbai North, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (MoS)- Jitin Prasada (Constituency- Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy Inaugurated "5G Use Case Test Lab" at CMPDI in Jharkhand

On January 09 2025, Union Minister **G. Kishan Reddy**, Ministry of Coal (MoC) and Ministry of Mines (MoM) inaugurated the "**5G Use Case Test Lab**" and launched a new corporate **logo** of Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited (**CMPDI**), a subsidiary of Coal India Limited(CIL), in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

- **Aim:** To promote digital transformation in coal sector in India through 5G technology and also address the industry's evolving key challenges.

i. During the event, Union MoS also unveiled '**Replica of CMPDI services**' sculpture made from scrap material from CMPDI like: delivery hose pipe, NQ drilling rod, core box, among others.

ii. MoC has designated CMPDI as the Centre of Excellence (**CoE**) for setting up 5G Use Case Test lab for coal industry to leverage 5G technology effectively.

About Ministry of Coal (MoC):

Union Minister- G. Kishan Reddy (Constituency- Secunderabad, Telangana)

Minister of State (MoS)- Satish Chandra Dubey (Rajya Sabha- Bihar)

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- **Aim:** To promote digital transformation in the coal sector in India through 5G technology and also address the industry's evolving key challenges.

Key People: Vikram Dev Dutt, Secretary of MoC; Vismita Tej, Additional Secretary of MoC, P.M. Prasad, Chairman of Coal India Limited (CIL), Manoj Kumar, Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) of CMPDI, Nilendu Kumar Singh, CMD of Central Coalfields Limited (CCL), Satish Jha, CMD of Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) and other senior officials were present at the event.

Key Points:

i. MoC has designated CMPDI as the Centre of Excellence (**CoE**) for setting up a 5G Use Case Test lab for the coal industry to leverage 5G technology effectively.

ii. During the event, Union MoS also unveiled '**Replica of CMPDI services**' sculpture made from scrap material from CMPDI like: delivery hose pipe, NQ drilling rod, core box, among others.

- This replica structure reflects the commitment of CMPDI to sustainable practices through intricate depictions of its services such as: geomatics, exploration, planning and design and environmental monitoring.

About 5G Use Case Lab:

i. The facility will serve as a testbed for developing, testing, and adapting 5G-based applications (app), customized to cater the specific requirements of coal mining operations.

- It is a lab-scale representation of an industry-specific 5G network, designed to support the coal mining industry.

ii. It will integrate 5G radio and core technologies with advanced Information Technology (IT)/ Operational Technology (OT) applications and equipment.

iii. It will test and develop 5G use cases like: voice, video and data communication applications, Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) sensors, and real-time monitoring in coal mining operations.

iv. The key focus areas of this facility include: to develop high-resolution video and IoT applications for mission specific tasks like: smart mining, mines digital twin, Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVs), among others.

About Ministry of Coal (MoC):

Union Minister- G. Kishan Reddy (Constituency- Secunderabad, Telangana)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Satish Chandra Dubey (Rajya Sabha- Bihar)

Union MoS Dr. Jitendra Singh unveiled Indian Genomic Data Set & IBDC Portals

On January 9, 2025, Union Minister of State (MoS) (Independent Charge, IC) **Dr. Jitendra Singh**, Ministry for Science and Technology (**MoS&T**) unveiled the **Indian Genomic Data Set** at the Genome India Data Conclave held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, Delhi.

- He also launched the Framework for Exchange of Data (**FeED**) Protocols and the Indian Biological Data Centre (**IBDC**) **Portals**, providing researchers in India and globally access to 10,000 whole genome samples.
- During the conclave, he announced a future target of sequencing 10 million genomes to accelerate India's advancements in genomics and personalized medicine.
- These initiative will create an ecosystem as a knowledge and innovation hub, contributing to the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

About Indian Genomic Data Set:

i.A compilation of 10,000 human genomes from 83 population groups in India, covering approximately 2% of the country's 4,600 population groups.

- This collection will serve as a foundation for future research on disease and drug therapies.

ii.It is now accessible to researchers worldwide to study genetic variations and develop more precise genomic tools. It is stored at the Indian Biological Data Centre (**IBDC**) in Faridabad, Haryana.

iii.This initiative aims to position India as a leader in genomics, facilitating the creation of genomic chips tailored to the Indian population, thus improving the accuracy of genetic studies.

About 'Framework for Exchange of Data (FeED)' Protocols:

The launch of FeED protocols under the Biotech-PRIDE Guidelines ensures that nation-specific data is shared transparently, fairly, and responsibly, reflecting India's commitment to ethical and secure data sharing.

Key Facts:

i.India's bioeconomy has expanded from United States Dollar (USD) 10 billion in 2014 to more than **USD 130 billion** in 2024, with forecasts predicting it will reach **USD 300 billion** by 2030.

ii.India currently holds the 12th position globally in biotech and 3rd in the Asia-Pacific region.

iii.India is the largest producer of vaccines globally and has the third-largest startup ecosystem.

iv.The number of biotech startups in India has surged from 50 in 2014 to over 8,500 in 2023, highlighting the country's growing leadership in biotechnology and its potential to transform the global bioeconomy.

BANKING & FINANCE

World Bank approves USD 35 million to enhance education in Meghalaya

On 7 January 2025, the World Bank's **(WB)** Board of Executive Directors approved **USD 35 million** loan for a project Meghalaya Multisectoral Project for Adolescent Wellbeing, Empowerment and Resilience (**MPOWER**) aimed to improve education quality in **Meghalaya**. The project will help the state's youth by enhancing resources and infrastructure.

- The loan from the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), part of the WB Group, has a final maturity of 15 years, including a grace period of 5 years.
- It aimed to better empower 5,00,000 adolescents to make the transition from school to work by lowering dropouts, improving learning outcomes and providing assistance for accessing jobs and starting businesses.

Note: The project draws inspiration from similar initiatives in Jharkhand, as well as successful WB operations in Tanzania and Bangladesh.

About MPOWER:

i.The project **MPOWER** will strengthen academic results for adolescents in **grades 6-12** and close gaps in students' reading and math skills.

- The total cost of the project is **USD 45 million** of which USD 35 million will be given by the WB and rest by the Government of India(GoI).

ii.It aims to lower dropout rates by giving students career assistance, mental health awareness, and life skills. Special focus will be on reaching dropout students and providing them with the same support.

- Meghalaya has one of the highest dropout rates in India, with 11% of students leaving school at the upper primary level and 22% of students dropping out at the secondary level.

iii.The project will also teach business skills to aspiring entrepreneurs and out-of-school adolescents in collaboration with the Meghalaya State Skills Development Society (MSSDS).

About World Bank(WB):

President – Ajay Banga

Headquarters – Washington, D.C., the United States of America (USA)

Established – 1944

About Meghalaya

Chief Minister (CM) – Conrad Kongkal Sangma

Governor – C H Vijayashankar

National Parks – Balphakram National Park, Nokrek Ridge National Park

Wildlife Sanctuaries – Siju Wildlife Sanctuary, Narpuh Wildlife Sanctuary

TMB Joins Bajaj Broking to Roll Out 3-in-1 Account Solution

On January 08, 2025, Thoothukudi (Tamil Nadu, TN)- based Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (**TMB**) Limited partnered with Pune (Maharashtra)- based **Bajaj Broking**, the broking arm of Bajaj Finance Limited (BFL), to launch a comprehensive **3-in-1 account solution** combining banking, broking, and investment services.

- The partnership aims to offer TMB customers seamless online trading via Bajaj Broking's platform while helping Bajaj Broking expand its digital services. Together, they plan to deliver client-focused solutions and explore new opportunities.

Key Points:

- i.**The 3-in-1 account simplifies fund transfers, minimizes paperwork, and offers a tech-driven platform for investing in a variety of financial products.
- ii.**The collaboration strengthens TMB's commitment to meet customers' financial needs by offering professional investment services through a trusted partner.
- iii.**Bajaj Broking aims to provide technology-driven services and research insights to more investors base. This partnership will enhance decision-making tools and expand its presence across India.

Broking Firm:

A broking firm, or brokerage firm, is a financial institution that facilitates the buying and selling of securities between buyers and sellers.

- These firms act as intermediaries in various financial markets, including stocks, bonds, commodities, and derivatives.

About Tamilnad Mercantile Bank (TMB) Limited:

Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Salee Sukumaran Nair

Headquarters – Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu (TN)

Founded – 1921

GSEDP Secures Rs 21.28 billion loan from IREDA for Smart Meter Project in UP

On January 9, 2025, Uttar Pradesh(UP) based GMR Smart Electricity Distribution (**GSEDPL**), a subsidiary of Grandhi Mallikarjuna Rao (GMR) Power and Urban Infra (GPUIL), secured approval for a **Rs 21.28 billion** (USD 247.66 million) loan from the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (**IREDA**). This loan will help finance the installation of 7.57 million smart meters across UP as part of a larger project valued at Rs 34.67 billion (USD 403.75 million).

- GSEDPL will operate and maintain the smart meters under a **10-year** contract with the distribution companies (DISCOMs.)
- The project aims to install smart meters in 5 zones: Varanasi, Azamgarh, Prayagraj, Mirzapur, Agra and Aligarh, served by two state **DISCOMs**: Purvanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam (**PuVNL**) and Dakshinanchal Vidyut Vitran Nigam (**DVVNL**).

i.The project will be implemented through three Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs): GMR Agra

Smart Meters Limited, GMR Kashi Smart Meters Limited, and GMR Triveni Smart Meters Limited.

- Bosch Global Software Technologies Private Limited (**BGSW**) was the technical partner for the project.

ii.GPUIL has extended a corporate guarantee of **Rs 440 crore** (USD 51.21) million to each SPV until the Commercial Operation Date (COD).

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

RBIHub partners with IIM-A to launch 'Swanari TechSprint 3.0' For Women's Financial Inclusion

On January 9 2025, the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (**RBIH**), the innovation arm and a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) has partnered with Gujarat based Indian Institutes of Management Ahmedabad's (IIM-A) startup incubator, **IIMA Ventures** (Formerly IIMA-Centre for Innovation, Incubation and Entrepreneurship, CIIE) to launch the 3rd cohort of the '**Swanari TechSprint 3.0**' programme.

- The programme is designed to accelerate women-centric fintech startups to scale their businesses.
- This initiative aims to conceptualise, develop and support innovations in technology that enhance access, usage and quality of financial services for all women in India.

Key Points:

- i. The Swanari TechSprint allows startups to develop and scale gender-inclusive financial solutions and provides expert mentorship, funding grants, and other forms of support.
 - ii. It focuses on empowering women-owned MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises), self-help groups, and street vendors, addressing barriers such as inactive bank accounts, limited access to savings products, and difficulties in securing credit.
 - iii. India has over **556 million** women aged 15–64 who remain underserved in financial services (according to the World Bank, WB).
- The programme aims to overcome these challenges by supporting startups that address the unique financial needs of women.
- iv. The programme is open to startups that have developed gender-focused financial solutions.
- Eligible applicants must have a minimum viable product and either pre-seed to pre-Series A funding or generate revenues or traction.
- v. Previous cohorts have highlighted successful startups like **Kaleidofin, Merakal, Vitto, Anniyam Payment, MaksPay, Manipal Business Solutions, Sampatti Card, Haqdarshak** and Agripal which have introduced innovative solutions for women's financial empowerment.

About Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH):

It has been set up as a Section 8 company under the Companies Act, 2013 with an initial capital contribution of Rs. 100 crore.

Chairman- Senapathy (Kris) Gopalakrishnan
Chief Executive Officer(CEO) – Rajesh Bansal,

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka,

Established – 2022

GHI and H2Carrier sign MoU to Advance Green Hydrogen and Ammonia Solutions

On January 9, 2025, New Delhi (Delhi) based Greenstat Hydrogen India (**GHI**) Private Limited, a unit of Norwegian renewable energy firm Greenstat ASA and Norway based **H2Carrier AS (H2C)** signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) to accelerate the development of green hydrogen and ammonia projects in **India** and **Sri Lanka**.

- The MoU aims to support global energy transition with scalable, cost-effective, and flexible green hydrogen and ammonia production.
- The collaboration will involve feasibility studies, project identification, and implementation of green hydrogen, ammonia production facilities, with an emphasis on floating production solutions.

i. The floating production solution will focus on leveraging **H2Carrier's P2X Floater technology**, the world's 1st floating green ammonia production facility.

ii. The projects will meet the rising demand for green ammonia, essential for clean fuel and decarbonization in sectors like shipping, agriculture, and heavy industries.

Note: GHI was established in 2020 to focus on the development of green hydrogen and its derivatives in Asia and the Middle East.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Anju Bobby George chaired Athletes Commission: Neeraj Chopra included among 9 athletes

On 8 January 2025, Long-jump great **Anju Bobby George** was named Chairperson of the Athletics Federation of India (AFI)'s **Athletes Commission**. Two-time Olympic medallist and javelin thrower **Neeraj Chopra** is one of the members in the Athletes Commission.

- This commission features India's **nine-athletes** with six women athletes and three men athletes.

Key Points:

i.The commission includes six women athletes: **Anju Bobby George**, a 2003 World Championships bronze medal winner and also a senior vice president in the AFI; runner **Jyotirmoyee Sikdar**; discus thrower **Krishna Poonia**; hurdler **MD Valsamma**; steeplechaser **Sudha Singh**; and runner **Sunita Rani**.

ii.Three men athletes including **Neeraj Chopra**, 3000m steeplechaser **Avinash Sable** and newly-elected AFI president **Bahadur Singh Sagoo**, a shot put gold medal winner at 2002 Asian Games.

- Bahadur Singh Sagoo was the chairman of the previous Athletes Commission.

iii.Outgoing AFI president Adille Sumariwalla, who served as AFI president for three consecutive terms from 2012, will continue to be a part of the executive council as an ex-officio member as he is a part of the World Athletics Council.

About Athletes Commission:

i.The Athletes Commission seeks to represent the viewpoints and interests of athletes within the Athletics Federation of India's governing bodies.

ii.The eligibility criteria include being a champion at the Asian or Commonwealth Games or at least participating in an Olympics or World Championships.

iii.The tenure of the Athletes Commission is four years; the current members are committed to the 2025–2029 cycle.

Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg to serve as the country's interim leader

Foreign Minister of **Austria Alexander Schallenberg** (55 years) of the Austrian People's Party (**OVP**) will be serving as the country's **Federal Chancellor** till the time the far-right Freedom Party is trying to form a new coalition government.

- Schallenberg was elected for this position after the existing leader **Karl Nehammer** announced his resignation on 4th January 2025.
- He will resume the office as interim Chancellor of Austria on **10th January 2025**.
- This marks Schallenberg's **second** tenure as interim Federal Chancellor. He served as chancellor for less than two months in **2021** after the resignation of then Chancellor **Sebastian Kurz**.
- Alexander Schallenberg has worked on the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of Chancellor Karl Nehammer since 2021, and has served on the same position from **2019 to 2021**.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

MDL delivers 6th Scorpene Submarine 'INS Vagsheer' to IN

On January 9, 2025, Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) delivered the **6th** and final Scorpene-class submarine, 'Indian Navy Ship **(INS) Vagsheer (S26)**' to the Indian Navy (IN) in Mumbai, Maharashtra, marking the successful completion of **Project P-75**.

- The Acceptance Document was signed by **Sanjeev Singhal**, Chairman & Managing Director (CMD), MDL and Rear Admiral (RAdm) **R Adhisrinivasan**, Chief Staff Officer (CSO) (Technical), Western Naval Command.
- India aims to be fully self-reliant in defence by **2047**, with numerous ships and submarines under construction in domestic shipyards.

Note:Other 5 Submarines: INS Kalvari (2015), INS Khanderi (2017), INS Karanj (2018), INS Vela (2021), and INS Vagir (2020).

Background :

i.Vagsheer (S26) was launched on **April 20, 2022**, underwent trials for more than a year, to ensure delivery of Combat Worthy Submarine.

- It was ordered in 2005, as part of the Project 75 program.

ii.This submarines have been completely built by MDL through a transfer of technology from Naval Group(France), in line with the Government of India's(GoI) "Make in India" policy.

Key Features of INS Vaghsheer :

i. Combat Capabilities: It is armed with wire-guided torpedoes and anti-ship missiles, which can be launched both underwater and at the surface.

- It boasts a very high level of automation with Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS) and a Combat Management System (CMS).

ii. Advanced Technology: It is equipped with **state-of-the-art** stealth technologies, including reduced radiated noise levels and a hydrodynamically optimized design, becoming the quietest submarines in the world.

- It can undertake multifarious types of missions such as Anti-Surface warfare, Anti-Submarine Warfare, Intelligence Gathering and Area Surveillance.

iii. Indigenous Systems: The submarine is fitted with indigenously developed systems including Air Conditioning Plant and Internal Communication & Broadcast System in addition to Main Batteries and Ku-Band SATCOM (Rukmini).

About Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL):

MDL is preparing for Project 75(I), which involves building 6 nuclear-powered attack submarines.

- As of September 2024, the government held an 84.83% stake in the defence PSU.

Chairman & Managing Director **(CMD)**– Sanjeev Singhal

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established- 1934

OBITUARY

Renowned playback singer P Jayachandran passed away

On January 9 2025, Renowned playback singer **P Jayachandran**, affectionately called as '**Bhava Gayakan**' passed away at the **age of 80** in Thrissur (Kerala). He was born on March 3 1944, in Ernakulam.

- He has won numerous awards including the 'National Film award'.

About P Jayachandran:

i.PJayachandran was an acclaimed playback singer, known for his versatility in singing in Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Hindi.

ii.His career began in **1966** with the song "Manjalayil Mungi Thorthi" from the Malayalam film Kalithozhan.

iii. Over a career spanning 5 decades, he recorded more than **16,000 songs** in various Indian languages.

- In 1986, he also acted in a Malayalam film for the 1st time (Nakhakshathangal).

Awards and Honors:

i. He received the '**National Film Award**' for Best Male Playback Singer (1986) for his outstanding contribution to Indian cinema .

ii.He received the '**J C Daniel Award**' the highest award in Malayalam cinema, for his contributions to Malayalam industry (2020).

iii. He received 5 Kerala State Film Awards and 4 Tamil Nadu (TN) State Film Awards: TN State Film Award (1994) and TN Kalaimamani Award (1997).

IMPORTANT DAYS

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2025 – January 9

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (**PBD**), also known as Non-Resident Indian (**NRI**) Day, celebrated once in two years on **9th January** is a significant event that honors the contributions of the Overseas Indian community (Indian diaspora) in the development of India.

Background :

The PBD is observed every year on 9th January since **2003** to commemorate the day in **1915** when **Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi**, popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, returned to India from South Africa to lead the country's freedom struggle.

- Since 2015, under a revised format, PBD Convention has been organised once **every 2 years** with the theme-based PBD Conferences.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention:

The PBD Convention, the flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs (**MEA**) was 1st introduced in 2003 by the Government of India (GoI), led by Late Prime Minister (PM) **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**. It aims to honor and connect with the

- The **18th** PBD Convention was held for the 1st time in Bhubaneswar, Odisha from **8th to 10th** January 2025.
- The theme of PBD Convention 2025: "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat" (Developed India).

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Overseas Indians/Indian Diaspora:

i. Indian Diaspora is a generic term used for addressing people who have migrated from the territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India.

ii. It constitutes Non Resident Indians (NRIs), and Persons of Indian origins (PIOs) including Overseas Citizens of India (OCI), who are foreign nationals with Indian roots.

- NRIs have rights like voting in India, which PIOs don't have.

iii. As of November 2024, there are around **35.4 million** overseas Indians around the world (data by MEA).

Note: To streamline processes and enhance engagement, the government merged PIO and OCI cardholders into a unified category, OCI, in 2015.

Objectives:

- To Honor the Indian diaspora's contributions to India's development.
- To Foster a better understanding of India abroad.
- To Support India's causes and promote the welfare of Indian communities worldwide.
- To Provide a platform for engagement with India's government and people.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention:

The PBD Convention, the flagship event of the Ministry of External Affairs (**MEA**) was 1st introduced in 2003 by the Government of India (GoI), led by Late Prime Minister (PM) **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**. It aims to honor and connect with the overseas Indian community, acknowledging their role in India's development.

i. 17 Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Conventions have been organised till date.

- The 17th PBD Convention took place in Indore, Madhya Pradesh (MP) from 8th to 10th January 2023.

ii. The **18th** PBD Convention was held for the 1st time in Bhubaneswar, Odisha from **8th to 10th** January 2025.

- The theme of PBD Convention 2025: "Diaspora's Contribution to a Viksit Bharat" (Developed India).

Segments of PBD Convention 2025:

i. Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas:

On 8th January 2025, the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas event was inaugurated jointly by the Union Minister **Subrahmanyam Jaishankar**, MEA, Union Minister **Mansukh L Mandaviya**, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS), and the Chief Minister (CM) of Odisha, **Mohan Charan Majhi**.

- The day serves as a platform for Pravasi youth from Odisha to reconnect with their cultural roots.

ii.18th PBD Convention:

On 9th January 2025, the Prime Minister (PM) of India, **Narendra Modi** inaugurated the 18th PBD Convention Event in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

- He also flagged off the **Pravasi Bharatiya Express**, a special tourist train under the 'Pravasi Teertha Darshan Yojana' scheme, MEA.

- He also inaugurated **4 exhibitions:**

1.Vishwaroop Ram – The Universal Legacy of Ramayana:

2.Diaspora's Contribution to Technology and Viksit Bharat.

3.Spread and Evolution of Indian diaspora in the world with special focus on Mandvi to Muscat.

4.Heritage and Culture of Odisha

The 18th PBD featured 5 thematic plenary sessions:

1. Diaspora Youth Leadership: Focus on leadership roles of youth in a globalized world.
2. Migrant Skills: Stories of overcoming barriers and contributing skills to bridge gaps.
3. Sustainable Development: Exploring the diaspora's contributions to green initiatives.
4. Women's Leadership: Recognizing the role of women in the diaspora, focusing on Nari Shakti (Women Power).
5. Cultural Connections: Exploring cultural dialogues and the sense of belonging among the diaspora.

iii.Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) 2025:

On 10th January 2025, the President of India, **Droupadi Murmu**, conferred the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awards (**PBSA**), highest honour conferred on overseas Indians, to 27 People to distinguished members of the Indian diaspora.

- The PBSA recognizes outstanding achievements of NRIs and PIOs in sectors like education, science and innovation, trade and industry, arts and culture, social work, public service and philanthropy.

World Hindi Day 2025 – January 10

World Hindi Day or **Vishwa Hindi Diwas** is annually observed across the globe on **10 January** to highlight the significance of the Hindi language and its role in connecting people globally.

- The day is observed to honor Hindi's global significance and to showcase its cultural diversity to the world, as well as to promote Hindi as an international language.
- The **theme** of this year is "A Global Voice of Unity and Cultural Pride," which aims to promote linguistic and global interchange through the use of Hindi.

Note: Hindi Diwas, also known as Hindi Day, is annually observed on **September 14** to commemorate the adoption of Hindi written in Devanagari script as one of the 22 official languages of India.

Background:

- i.**In 1949, Hindi was first spoken at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, the United States of America(USA).
- ii.**In a meeting of the Follow up Committee on World Hindi Conference held on June 8, 2005, it was decided to commemorate 10th January as World Hindi Day every year.
- iii.**In 2006, former Prime Minister (PM) Dr. Manmohan Singh presided over the inaugural celebration of Vishwa Hindi Diwas.

- Since then, January 10 has been observed globally as World Hindi Day.

- iv.**The **first-ever World Hindi Day** was celebrated on **10 January 2006** to mark the anniversary of the first World Hindi Conference in Nagpur, Maharashtra on 10 January 1975.
- v.**The Ministry of External Affairs (**MEA**) commemorates this day around the world by organising a variety of events and activities through Indian embassies and cultural centres.

Significance of Hindi:

- i.**The term "Hindi" is derived from the Persian language.
- ii.**Hindi is an Indo-European language and also a descendant of the Sanskrit language.
- iii.**Hindi is the third most spoken language in the world, with about 4.46% of the world population. It ranks fourth in the world in terms of the number of native speakers, behind English, Spanish, and Chinese.
- iv.**In 1950, Hindi was declared the official language of India and was designated as Hindi in Devanagari script in Article 343 of the Indian Constitution.

- Hindi is one of the 22 scheduled languages, listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

AICTE declared 2025 as 'Year of AI' to shape India as global leader

The **All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** has announced **2025** as the **"Year of Artificial Intelligence (AI)"** to shape India as a global leader in AI.

- This initiative will be adopted by all AICTE-approved institutions, empowering around **14,000** colleges and benefiting **40 million** students nationwide.

Its key **features**

i.The Institutes will adopt an **AI Affirmation Pledge** to make India a global leader in AI through innovation, ethics, and education.

ii.AI Awareness Campaigns: A nation wide campaign **"AI for all: The Future Begins Here"** will be held which include workshops, hackathons, and guest lectures to raise awareness about AI's potential among the students. Also council will organize **workshops and certifications** to provide training to **faculty** in AI education.

iii.The institutes will be encouraged to accommodate interdisciplinary **courses** and research programs related to AI, set up AI labs with industries and promote socially ethical AI practices.

iv.Moreover, students will be provided with the real-time experience through internships, projects, and mentorships through collaborations by the council with global companies like Adobe, CISCO, and International Business Machines (IBM).

v.**Top-performing institutions** will be recognized by **AICTE** and will serve as the role models of AI excellence for other institutes.

12th & 13th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal chaired 2nd IWDC Meet in Assam

The **2nd** Inland Waterways Development Council (**IWDC**) meet, organized by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the nodal agency for the development of waterways under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW), was held from **9th January** to **10th January** 2025 in **Kaziranga, Assam** to discuss upon the policies to enhance inland waterways and its infrastructure in India.

- The meeting was presided over by the Union Minister **Sarbananda Sonowal**, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways(MoPSW).

i. During the meeting, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal unveiled Initiatives worth more than **Rs.1400 crore** to boost inland waterways transport network across 21 Inland Waterway States.

ii. The National River Traffic and Navigation System (**NRT&NS**) was launched to create a safe, seamless and sustainable movement of Inland vessels, during the event.

iii. During the meeting, the Union Minister announced an investment of **Rs.50,000 crore** over the next **five** years to strengthen infrastructure on national waterways.

About Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI):

Chairman– Vijay Kumar

Headquarters– Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP)

Founded– 1986

The **2nd** Inland Waterways Development Council (**IWDC**) **meet**, organized by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the nodal agency for the development of waterways under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW), was held from **9th January** to **10th January** 2025 in **Kaziranga, Assam** to discuss upon the policies to enhance inland waterways and its infrastructure in India.

- The meeting was presided over by the Union Minister **Sarbananda Sonowal**, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways(MoPSW).

Key People:

The meeting was attended by Union Minister of State(MoS) Shantanu Thakur, MoPSW; Aleixo Sequeira, Ports Minister of Goa; Jogen Mohan, Transport Minister of Assam; Khashim Vashum, Transport Minister of Manipur; Satish Sharma, Transport Minister of Jammu & Kashmir(J & K); Pu Vanlalhlana, Transport Minister of Mizoram, and Ojing Tasing, Transport Minister of Arunachal Pradesh(AR), among others.

Highlights of 2nd IWDC Meet :

Launches:

i.During the meeting, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal unveiled Initiatives worth more than **Rs.1400 crore** to boost inland waterways transport network across 21 Inland Waterway States.

ii.The National River Traffic and Navigation System (**NRT&NS**) was launched to create a safe, seamless and sustainable movement of Inland vessels during the event.

iii.The **Central Database Module** and Issuance of Certificates was also launched with an aim to streamline out the process of certification for vessel owners.

iv.The government also plans to launch 1,000 green vessels to boost economic opportunities through sustainable inland waterway transport.

Announcements:

i. During the meeting, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal announced an investment of **Rs.50,000 crore** over the next **five** years to strengthen infrastructure on national waterways.

- He also announced the setting up of Regional Centre of Excellence (RcoE) in Dibrugarh, Assam.

ii. The Union Minister also announced the setting up of 6 floating steel jetties on river Godavari (NW 4) at Gandipochamma Temple, Pochavaram, Perantapalli village in Andhra Pradesh (AP).

iii. A feasibility study on river Penna (NW 79) was also announced along with DPR of NW 4 to get additional inputs for development.

iv. A budget of more than **Rs.3000 crore** will be allocated for the development of National Waterways (**NW**)2, **NW16** and the Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route (**IBPR**) by **2030**.

Points to Note:

i. The cargo traffic on national waterways has increased in the last 10 years – from 18 million tons a decade ago to **133 million tons** in Financial Year (FY) 2023-24 at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of over **22%**.

ii. A policy initiative named **Riverine Community Development Scheme** was launched with an aim to improve the socio-economic well-being of communities along the waterways through infrastructure upgrades, trade and tourism promotion, and skill development for coastal communities.

About Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI):

Chairman– Vijay Kumar

Headquarters– Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP)

Founded– 1986

BANKING & FINANCE

DSP Asset Managers Launches India's First BSE Sensex Next 30 Index Fund And ETF

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based **DSP Asset Managers Private Limited**, a leading Indian asset management company (AMC) offering a range of mutual funds (MF), introduced a **first**-of-its-kind investment opportunity with the launch of two new schemes: '**DSP BSE (Bombay Stock Exchange) Sensex Next 30 Index Fund**' and '**DSP BSE Sensex Next 30 ETF (Exchange-Traded Fund)**'.

- The New Fund Offer (NFO) for these innovative schemes opened on **January 10, 2025**, and will remain available for subscription until **January 24, 2025**.

About BSE Sensex Next 30 Index Fund And ETF:

- These schemes are **open-ended** equity funds specifically designed to track the performance of the BSE Sensex Next 30 Index.
 - These funds aim to give investors access to **30 large companies** that are not part of the BSE Sensex but hold strong potential for future growth. While they could offer better returns, they also come with higher levels of risk.
 - The index is diversified across key sectors, including Financial Services (19%), Consumer Discretionary (18%), Commodities (18%), Energy (10%), Healthcare (10%), Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) (8%), and Industrials (8%).
- The portfolio reconstitution, or changes to the index constituents, will take place every six months.
- Investors can contribute either through a **lump-sum investment** or by setting up a Systematic Investment Plan (SIP).

Investments:

- Investors can begin with a minimum investment of **Rs.100**, applicable to both lump sum and additional investments, while the same amount applies to SIPs.

- The Opening Net Asset Value (NAV) for the fund is Rs.10.

- The scheme will allocate 95-100% of its assets to equity and equity-related securities included in the BSE SENSEX Next 30 Index.

- A small portion, ranging from 0-5%, will be held in cash and cash equivalents to manage liquidity.

About DSP Asset Managers Private Limited:

Chairman– Hemendra Mathradas Kothari

Headquarters– Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established– 1996

SEBI Grants License to Strata for SM REIT

In January 09 2025, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (**SEBI**) granted the licence to Bengaluru (Karnataka) based Strata Capital Management Private Limited(**SCMPL**) , a real estate fractional ownership platform, for its Small and Medium Real Estate Investment Trust (SM REIT), named **Strata SM REIT**.

- This is SEBI's **fourth** approval, following similar licenses issued to Property Share, Rudrabhishek Enterprises Limited (REPL), and Emberstone.
- Strata Capital will serve as the Investment Manager for the SM REIT, with Axis Trustee acting as the trustee.

About Strata SM REIT:

i.Strata SM REIT will provide retail and institutional investors with access to premium commercial properties in key locations, streamlining real estate investments. It also enhances transparency, safeguards investors, and ensures a regulated investment environment.

- It aligns with SEBI's regulations to streamline fractional ownership platforms into a structured investment model.

ii.Strata plans to list assets worth Rs. 2,000 Crore by Financial Year 2025–26 (FY26), offering retail and institutional investors access to commercial real estate through SM REIT.

- It aims to launch up to six SM REIT schemes in FY26 and gradually introduce one scheme each month.

About Small and Medium Real Estate Investment Trusts (SM REIT):

i.SM-REIT was introduced by SEBI in March 2024 to encourage smaller real estate investments and increase participation in the sector.

ii.SM-REITs are a type of Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) that enables individual investors to invest in properties such as office buildings, hotels, hospitals, and retail malls.

- They provide an opportunity for smaller investors to participate in the real estate market with lower capital requirements.

iii.Regulations:

- SM REITs can invest in real estate assets valued between **Rs. 50 crore and Rs. 500 crore**.
- It must have a minimum of 200 investors, excluding the investment manager and their associates.
- The minimum investment amount for SM REITs is Rs.10 lakh.

Groww Asset Management Launches India's First Groww Nifty India Railways PSU ETF

The **Groww Nifty India Railways PSU (Public Sector Undertaking) Index Fund** and **Groww Nifty India Railways PSU ETF (Exchange Traded Fund)** were launched by **Groww Mutual Fund**, an Asset Management Company. Both are passive funds that track the Nifty India Railways PSU Index, focusing on public sector undertakings in the railway sector.

- **Groww Nifty India Railways (IR) PSU ETF** will be first of its kind in India. The New Fund Offer (NFO) will be available from January 16 to January 30, 2025.
- The scheme will re-open for investments on or before February 13, 2025.
- Both schemes aim for long-term capital appreciation by investing in equity and equity-related instruments of companies constituting the Nifty India Railways PSU Index.

About Groww Nifty India Railways PSU ETF:

The Groww Nifty India Railways PSU ETF is an open-ended scheme that tracks the Nifty India Railways PSU Index – TRI (**Total Return Index**). It has been created following the guidelines and regulations set by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for mutual funds, ensuring it complies with the latest amendments.

- Exit Load: None.
- Minimum Investment: Rs.500 and above in multiples of Rs.1.
- Asset Allocation:
- 95-100% in Nifty India Railways PSU Index securities.
- 0-5% in money market/debt instruments.
- Strategy: Mirror the index with minimal tracking error.

About Groww Nifty India Railways PSU Index Fund:

- Exit Load: 1% if redeemed within 30 days; nil thereafter.
- Minimum SIP (Systematic Investment Plan): Rs.100 and above in multiples of Rs.1.
- Asset Allocation:
- 95-100% in Nifty India Railways PSU Index equities.
- 0-5% in debt instruments or ETFs.
- Strategy: Minimize tracking error via portfolio rebalancing.

Note:The Nifty India Railways PSU Index has performed well, even outperforming the Nifty 500 Index, emphasizing the strong growth prospects of this sector.

About Groww Asset Management Limited:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- Varun Gupta

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established- 2008

RBI Lifts Restrictions on AMFL and DFPL

On January 8, 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) removed business restrictions imposed on Chennai (Tamil Nadu) based Ashirvad Micro Finance Limited (**AMFL**) and New Delhi (Delhi) based DMI Finance Private Limited (**DFPL**) following remedial measures initiated by the lenders and their commitment to adhere to fair loan pricing and regulatory guidelines.

- i.**The RBI directed the 2 Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) to cease and desist from sanctioning and disbursing loans, effective from the close of business on **October 21, 2024**.
- ii.**The RBI had found that AMFL and DFPL were charging excessive interest rates and not complying with regulatory guidelines, particularly concerning Weighted Average Lending Rates (**WALR**) and interest spreads.

PhonePe and ICICI Lombard Unite for Maha Kumbh Mela Insurance

On January 09, 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka) – based **PhonePe** and Mumbai (Maharashtra) – based **ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company Limited** launched the first-of-its-kind insurance coverage created exclusively for travelers attending the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh (**UP**), from January 13 to February 26, 2025.

- The insurance plan is offered in two options to suit a wide range of travelers: **Rs. 59 per person** for those traveling by train or bus, and **Rs. 99 per person** for those traveling by domestic flights.
- The product offers a total sum insured of **Rs. 1 lakh**, covering various risks with specific amounts for each.

i.The plan provides devotees with wide-ranging coverage, including hospitalization, doctor visits, outpatient care, personal accidents, lost

baggage, trip cancellations, missed flights, and repatriation of remains.

ii.Users can purchase this plan on PhonePe until February 25, 2025, and enjoy full coverage throughout their journey and stay at the Maha Kumbh Mela, ensuring a safe pilgrimage for millions.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

UN-DESA's WESP 2025 Report: Indian Economy Likely to Grow 6.6% in 2025

In January 2025, United Nations- Department of Economic and Social Affairs (**UN-DESA**) released a report titled "[World Economic Situation and Prospects \(WESP\) 2025](#)". The report has projected that India economy will grow by **6.6%** in 2025, mainly driven by strong private consumption and investment growth. Indian economy is further expected to expand by **6.7%** in 2026.

- The report revealed that Indian economy registered the growth rate of **6.8%** in 2024.

i. As per the report, South Asia Region (SAR) is expected to remain robust, with growth rate at **5.7%** (in 2025) and **6.0%** (in 2026).

- This growth is mainly driven by strong performance in India as well as economy recovery in countries like: Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

ii. The report has projected that global economic growth rate will be at **2.8%** (in 2025) and **2.9%** (in 2026). These projections are largely same from the rate of 2.8% registered in 2023 and estimated for 2024.

About United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs (UN-DESA):

Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs – Li Junhua

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Establishment- 1948

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- Indian economy is further expected to expand by **6.7%** in 2026.
- The report revealed that Indian economy registered the growth rate of **6.8%** in 2024.
- The report has projected that global economic growth rate will be at **2.8%** (in 2025) and **2.9%** (in 2026).

India-Specific Findings:

- i.**The report highlights that capital expenditure (capex) on infrastructure will significantly boost India's economic growth in the coming years.
 - ii.**The report underscored that strong export growth in services and certain categories, particularly pharmaceuticals and electronics, along with expansion in the manufacturing and services sectors will strengthen economic activity for India.
 - iii.**The public sector in India continues to fund large-scale infrastructure projects, physical and digital connectivity, and social infrastructure, including improvements in sanitation and water supply. Strong investment growth is estimated to continue through 2025.
 - iv.**Consumer price inflation in India is expected to decelerate from an estimated 4.8% (in 2024) to 4.3% (in 2025). This is in line with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s 2 to 6% medium-term target range.
 - Easing inflation has led most central banks to halt rate hikes or reduce policy rates in 2024. The RBI has kept its **6.5% policy rate unchanged since February 2023** due to ongoing inflation risks.
 - v.**The United Nations (UN) estimates India's growth rate at 6.6% for this FY 2025-26, slightly higher than the **National Statistics Office (NSO)** projection of 6.4% for 2024-25.
- Note** – National Statistics Office (NSO) is an Indian government agency under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (**MoSPI**).

Key Findings Related to South Asia Region:

i.As per the report, South Asia Region(SAR) is expected to remain robust, with growth rate at **5.7%** (in 2025) and **6.0%** (in 2026).

- This growth is mainly driven by strong performance in India as well as economy recovery in countries like: Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Pakistan and Sri Lanka are projected to see modest GDP growth of 3.4% and 4.0%, respectively.
- Bhutan and Nepal are expected to grow by over 5%, while Bangladesh's economy may slow due to unrest and ongoing political uncertainty in mid-2024.

ii.The report observed that investment growth has remained strong particularly in East and South Asia region, partly supported by domestic and foreign investments in new supply chains in countries like: Indonesia, and Vietnam.

iii.The report has outlined certain challenges like: weaker external demand, persistent debt challenges, social unrest and political uncertainties in some countries may dampen the outlook for SAR.

Global Scenario:

- i.**The report has projected that global economic growth rate will be at **2.8%** (in 2025) and **2.9%** (in 2026). These projections are largely same from the rate of 2.8% registered in 2023 and estimated for 2024.
- ii.**The report highlighted that Global inflation has decreased from 5.6% (in 2023) to an estimated 4.0% (in 2024) and is expected to further decrease **to 3.4% in 2025.**
- iii.**The United States of America (**USA**) is expected to grow at **1.9%** in 2025 and recover marginally to 2.1% in 2026 amid weaker labour market performance, modest income growth and cuts in public spending.
- iv.**As per the report, the growth rate of China is estimated at **4.9%** for 2024 and is expected to decrease marginally by 10 basis points (bps) i.e. to 4.8% in 2025.
- v.**The Economic growth in the Least Developed Countries (**LDCs**) is projected to increase from 4.1% estimated for 2024 to 4.6% in 2025.
 - While, the growth rate for Small Island Developing States (**SIDS**) is projected to increase by an average of 3.4% in 2025, decrease from 3.8% in 2024.

About United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs (UN-DESA):

Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs – Li Junhua

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Establishment- 1948

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Kerala's Kappad and Chal Beaches Earn 'Blue Flag' Certification

On January 10 2025, Kerala's renowned **Kappad beach** in Kozhikode and **Chal beach** in Kannur respectively received the coveted '**Blue Flag certification**' from the Denmark based non-profit organization 'Foundation for Environmental Education' (**FEE**).

- This certification is awarded to beaches and marinas that meet **33 criteria**, focusing on environmental education, water quality, safety, services, and waste management.

Key Points:

i.Kappad Beach has earned the Blue Flag certification for the **4th consecutive** year. The beach underwent upgrades in 2020, including the installation of **solar-powered lights, bio-toilets**, and **disabled-friendly pathways**, to meet the stringent criteria required for certification.

ii.Chal Beach also secured the Blue Flag certification, contributing to Kerala's rising profile as a sustainable tourism destination.

Note:The historical significance of Kappad was the site where **Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama** 1st landed in 1498 .

About Blue Flag certification:

i.The Blue Flag certification is an eco-label awarded to beaches, marinas, and sustainable boating tourism operators that meet stringent environmental and safety standards globally as a mark of excellence.

- The 'Blue Flag' programme was started in 1987, initially in Europe and the certification is awarded annually.
- In 2024, over **5,000 beaches**, marinas, and tourist boats across 51 countries have received a Blue Flag.
- India is now the **4th country** in Asia after South Korea, Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with 'blue flag beaches'.

ii.As of November 2024, India has **12 Blue Flag** beaches.The beaches are: Shivrajpur (Gujarat), Ghoghla (Daman & Diu), Kasarkod (Karnataka), Padubidri (Karnataka), Kappad (Kerala), Rushikonda (Andhra Pradesh(AP)), Golden beach (Odisha), Radhanagar (Andaman and Nicobar(A&N)), Kovalam (Tamil Nadu(TN)), Eden (Puducherry), Tarkarli (Maharashtra) and Bangaram (Lakshadweep).

About Kerala:

Chief Minister (CM)- Pinarayi Vijayan

Governor- Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar

Stadium- Lal Bahadur Shastri stadium, VKN Menon Indoor Stadium

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Nicolas Maduro Moros Sworn in as President of Venezuela for 3rd consecutive term

On January 11 2025, **Nicolas Maduro Moros** was sworn in as the **53rd President** of Venezuela for the **3rd** consecutive term. The swearing-in ceremony was held at the National Assembly in Caracas, Venezuela.

- He will be serving as the President of Venezuela for a period of **6 years** until 2031.

About Nicolas Maduro:

i.Nicolás Maduro Moros is a Venezuelan politician who began his political career in the 1990s as a Member of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (**PSUV**).

ii.In 2006, he served as the Foreign Minister of Venezuela, a position he held until 2013 and gained international recognition for his advocacy of socialist policies.

iii.In 2010, he served as **24th** Vice President (**VP**) of Venezuela under Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías (Former Venezuela President).

iv.In March 2013, he was appointed as interim President (following the death of the former President).

- He won the presidential election and served as the President of Venezuela since April 2013 (6years term).

v.In March 2018, he served as the President for the 2nd consecutive term.

Awards and Honors:

i.In 2015, he received 'the **Order of the Liberator from Bolivia**' Venezuela's highest civilian award, in recognition of his outstanding services to the country.

ii.In 2007, he received the "**Orden Francisco de Miranda**" Venezuela's highest civilian award for his outstanding contributions to the country's progress.

About Venezuela:

Venezuela is a country in South America.

Capital- Caracas

Currency- Venezuelan Bolívares (**VEF**)

Joseph Khalil Aoun elected as the 14th President of Lebanon

On January 9 2025, General **Joseph Khalil Aoun** was elected as the **14th President** of Lebanon. He won the parliamentary election by securing 99 votes out of 128 votes. The session was the legislature's 13th attempt to elect a successor to former President **Michel Naim Aoun** whose term ended in October 2022.

- He is the fifth army commander to become president in Lebanon's history.
- Currently, he is serving as the **Commander of Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)**.

About Joseph Khalil Aoun:

i. Joseph Khalil Aoun joined the 'Lebanese Army' in 1983 during the Civil War and received training in the United States of America (USA) and Syria.

- He served as a Platoon commander in the army rangers and participated in several key operations, including the 'Adma Battle', Lebanon during the war.

ii. He was promoted to the rank of general in 2013 and he has led the 9th Infantry Brigade in the LAF since 2015.

iii. He was appointed as the **14th Commander** of the LAF in 2017 where he successfully led the LAF in counter-terrorism operations against the 'Islamic State' and 'Al-Nusra Front'.

iv. He received widespread backing from political groups within Lebanon, and in December 2023, his term as LAF commander was extended twice, notably during the 2024 Israeli invasion.

Honors and Awards:

i. He has received several military honors, including the War Medal (3 times), 'Medal of the Wounded' (twice), and the 'Order of Merit' in various classes for his outstanding contributions in LAF.

ii. He has also been recognized with the 'National Order of the Cedar', including the rank of 'Knight and Officer'.

About Lebanon:

Prime Minister (PM)– Najib Azmi Mikati

President– Joseph Khalil Aoun

Capital– Beirut

Currency– Lebanese Pound (LBP)

Brijendra Pratap Singh appointed as CMD of NALCO

On January 10 2025, **Brijendra Pratap Singh** was appointed as the Chairman-cum-Managing Director (**CMD**) of National Aluminium Company (**NALCO**) succeeding Sridhar Patra. He will be presiding over the corporate office of NALCO located in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

- Prior to joining NALCO, he served as the Director-In-Charge for **Burnpur** and Durgapur Steel Plant (**DSP**), West Bengal(WB) and was a member of the Board of Directors (BoD) of Steel Authority of India Limited (**SAIL**).

i.In 1989, he began his career in the steel industry at the Iron Ore Mine of Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP),Chhattisgarh and has since worked in key positions in both frontline operations and leadership at 4 of SAIL's integrated steel plants: BSP, BSL (Bokaro Steel Limited), DSP and ISP (Indian Iron and Steel Company (IISCO) Steel Plant).

ii.He has over **35 years** of experience in the field of mining and steel sectors.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Pixxel announced partnership with SIIS to supply Hyperspectral Satellite Data in Korea

In January 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based **Pixxel**, a space technology startup specialising in hyperspectral earth-imaging technology, announced partnership with Korea-based **SIIS Co., Ltd.** to supply **hyperspectral satellite data** in Korea.

- The agreement was signed in November 2024, during the Satellite Utilization Conference in Seoul, South Korea, a major milestone in the process of providing hyperspectral data to relevant institutions and companies in the country.

Key Points:

i. This partnership aims to provide transformative insights that enable end-users across industries to tackle complex challenges.

ii. Pixxel's hyperspectral data provides significantly more spectral resolution than standard multispectral data, allowing for accurate analysis of the physical and chemical aspects of the Earth's surface and atmosphere.

iii. Through a partnership with Pixxel, SIIS aims to strengthen its position in the market by fusing material insights from hyperspectral imaging with high-resolution spatial data.

iv. Pixxel is set to launch its **Fireflies constellation** of six commercial-grade hyperspectral satellites in 2025.

- These satellites are designed to deliver 5-meter(m) resolution, a 40-kilometer(km) swath, and daily revisit capabilities across hundreds of spectral bands.

v. SIIS plans to enhance its Earth observation capabilities with the launch of **SpaceEye-T** in March 2025.

- This satellite will be **Korea's first** private Earth observation platform, offering 30 centimetre(cm) class ultra-high-resolution spatial data to support various applications and industries globally.

About Pixxel:

Pixxel is the first Indian space startup to secure the order from NASA.

Founder and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Awais Ahmed

Headquarters – Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established – 2019

ENVIRONMENT

New Pangolin species discovered in Arunachal Pradesh by ZSI team

In January 2025, a new species of pangolin named, the Indo-Burmese pangolin, scientifically called '**Manis indoburmanica**', was discovered by researchers at the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) from Arunachal Pradesh (AR). It separated from the Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) about 3.4 million years ago.

i. This new species belongs to the family 'Manidae'. The scale is dark brown and dark olive brown, while the face is pinkish in color. The body is covered in bristle-like fur, just like other Asian pangolins.

ii. Researchers have found two rare Order Neuroptera species, '**Glenochrysa zeylanica**' and '**Indophanes barbara**' from Kerala. The findings were produced by the Shadpada Entomology Research Lab (SERL) research team at Christ College, Irinjalakuda, Kerala.

- *Glenochrysa zeylanica* is a green lacewing of the Chrysopidae family in Order Neuroptera.
- *Indophanes barbara* is an antlion belonging to the Myrmeleontidae family. It can be easily distinguished by their long distinct antennae.

In January 2025, a new species of pangolin named, the Indo-Burmese pangolin, scientifically called '**Manis indoburmanica**', was discovered by researchers at the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) from Arunachal Pradesh (AR). It separated from the Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) about 3.4 million years ago.

- This finding has been published in the paper 'Indo Burmese pangolin (*Manis indoburmanica*): a novel phylogenetic species of pangolin evolved in Asia' in the German-published popular scientific journal **Mammalian Biology**.

About Indo-Burmese pangolin:

i.This new species belongs to the family 'Manidae'. The scale is dark brown and dark olive brown, while the face is pinkish in color. The body is covered in bristle-like fur, just like other Asian pangolins.

ii.The species have evolved in isolation during the Pliocene and Pleistocene epochs due to geological and climatic changes.

- Its present range includes parts of AR and Assam, and it may also reach Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar.

iii.Dr. Mukesh Thakur of the ZSI led the study, which analyzed mitochondrial genomes using state-of-the-art genomic methods.

iv.The discovery of Indo-Burmese pangolin highlights the necessity of region-specific conservation initiatives while also enhancing our knowledge of Asian pangolins.

About Pangolins:

- i. Pangolins are among the most trafficked wild mammals globally.
- ii. India is home to two species: the Indian Pangolin, found across the subcontinent; and the Chinese Pangolin, found across a larger area in south Asia.
 - Bihar, West Bengal(WB) and Assam have both species in their States.

Note: World Pangolin Day is observed every year on the third Saturday in February.

Two rare Neuroptera species found in Kerala

Researchers have found two rare Order Neuroptera species, '**Glenochrysa zeylanica**' and '**Indophanes barbara**' from Kerala.

- The findings were produced by the Shadpada Entomology Research Lab (SERL) research team at Christ College, Irinjalakuda, Kerala.
- The findings are published in the recent issue of the two international scientific journals: Journal of the Entomological Research Society and Natura Somogyiensis.

About **Glenochrysa zeylanica**:

- i. **Glenochrysa zeylanica** is a green lacewing of the Chrysopidae family in Order Neuroptera.
 - This is the 12th green lacewing species and 8th antlion species reported from Kerala.

Note: Neuroptera is a group of insects commonly called lacewings because of the complex vein patterns in the wings, giving them a lacy appearance.

- ii. The species was rediscovered after 111 years from Mananthavady and Thirunelly in Wayanad district, Kerala.

- iii. This species was found for the first time in India, previously endemic to Sri Lanka.

About *Indophanes barbara*:

i. *Indophanes barbara* is an antlion belonging to the Myrmeleontidae family. It can be easily distinguished by their long distinct antennae.

- An antlion species has been identified across various locations in Kerala.

ii. Unlike common antlion species, *Indophanes barbara* larvae do not form pits. They are shielded from the sun, wind, and rain by living under the surface in loose soils.

SPORTS

New Zealand Cricketer Martin Guptill Retires from International Cricket

On 9th January 2025, New Zealand cricketer 38-year-old **Martin Guptill** announced his retirement from international cricket. He played 367 games for New Zealand in total and scored 13,463 runs in his 14-year international career.

i. He played 198 One Day Internationals (ODIs), 122 Twenty20 Internationals (T20Is), 47 Tests and scored 23 centuries across the three formats and breaking numerous white-ball batting records.

ii. He became the first New Zealand cricketer to score an ODI double-century achieving an unbeaten 237 in the International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup 2015 quarter-final against the West Indies at Wellington Stadium, New Zealand.

iii. He is the current captain of the Auckland Aces now will continue to play T20 franchise and domestic cricket matches.

OBITUARY

Veteran Soldier Havaladar Baldev Singh Passed Away

In January 2025, Veteran soldier (retired) **Havaladar Baldev Singh**, who fought four wars against Pakistan, passed away at the age of 93 in Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). He was born on 27th September 1931 in Naunihal village, Nowshera, J&K.

i. Singh had volunteered at age 16 to join **Bal Sena Force** under the leadership of Brigadier Usman, Commander of the 50 Para Brigade, during the battle of Nowshera and Jhangar in 1947-48.

ii. In 1950, he joined the Indian Army, where he served for nearly three decades. He served during several battles, notably the India-Pakistan conflicts in 1961, 1962, and 1965.

iii. He retired from service in 1969, but he was recalled during the India-Pakistan war in 1971 and served for another eight months.

BOOKS & AUTHORS

'How India scaled Mt G20: The inside story of the G20 Presidency' authored by Amitabh Kant

In January 2025, the book titled **'How India scaled Mt G20: The inside story of the G20 Presidency'** written by **Amitabh Kant** was released. This book was published by Rupa Publications India.

- The book explores India's pivotal role in hosting and shaping the Group of Twenty (G20) during its presidency (December 1, 2022 and ended on November 30, 2023).

i. The book highlights India's initiatives to address pressing global challenges, such as economic disparities, climate change, and technological innovation.

ii. Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa of India, served as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, the Government of India (GoI).

IMPORTANT DAYS

National Road Safety Week 2025 – January 11 to 17

National Road Safety Week, organised by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), is annually observed across India from **January 11-17** every year to raise awareness about road safety. It highlights the need for responsible driving, pedestrian safety, and better road infrastructure to prevent and reduce accidents and save lives.

- 2025 marks the observance of the **36th** National Road Safety Week.

Background:

i.The **1st-ever** National Road Safety Week, introduced by the MoRTH, was observed in **1989**.

- It was later expanded to a month-long observance in 2021 to intensify road safety efforts.

ii.The annual observance is led by the MoRTH to promote road safety measures.

National Road Safety Month (RSM):

i.It is an annual observance introduced by the MoRTH to sensitize citizens and road users about the severity of the challenges of road safety.

- The first National RSM was observed in 2021.
- In 2025 the National RSM is being observed from **January 1-31, 2025**.

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- The National Safety Council of India (**NSC**) under the Ministry of Labour & Employment (MoL&E), also organises the National Road Safety Week.

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Key Highlights on Road Safety in India:

i. The 'India Status Report on Road Safety 2024' of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) New Delhi (Delhi) indicates concerning trends in road safety. As per the Report,

- **Accident Statistics:** India accounted for **11%** of global road accidents and **10%** of global fatalities.
- **Vulnerable Groups:** Pedestrians, cyclists, and 2-wheeler riders constitute over **50%** of fatalities.
- **High-Risk States:** States like Uttar Pradesh (UP), Tamil Nadu (TN), and Maharashtra report the highest number (50%) of accidents and fatalities. West Bengal (WB) and Bihar had the lowest rates at (5.9%).

ii. The **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019** was implemented to strengthen road safety norms and law enforcement to reduce fatalities.

iii. The National Highway Accident Relief Service Scheme (**NHARSS**) was introduced to provide quick medical aid to accident victims.

iv. The National Road Safety Policy (NRSP) was introduced in 2010 following recommendations by the **S. Sundar Committee** in 2007 to reduce road accidents and fatalities in India.

UN's Global Road Safety Week:

i. The United Nations Global Road Safety Week (**UNGRSW**) is a biennial campaign, hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO), aimed to raise awareness of road safety and reduce the number of road deaths.

- This week-long event is observed across the globe in May every year.
- In 2024, it was observed from **May 10–14**.

ii. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted resolution "Improving global road safety" with the ambitious target of preventing at least 50% of road traffic deaths and injuries by 2030.

STATE NEWS

Karnataka launches 'Garudakshi' portal for Forest Protection

In January 2025, Karnataka's Forest Department launched 'Garudakshi' portal to register an online First Information Report (**FIR**) cases for forest crimes such as encroachments, poaching, and illegal logging.

- The initiative was inaugurated by the Minister of Forests, Ecology, and Environment **Eshwar B. Khandre**, which was developed in collaboration with Noida(Uttar Pradesh, UP) based Wildlife Trust of India (**WTI**).

i.This system aims to increase public participation in forest conservation activities, case management, and efficiency.

ii.Initially, Garudakshi will be implemented on a pilot basis in five divisions: Bengaluru Urban Division, Bengaluru Forest Mobile Squad Division, Bhadravati Division, Sirsi Division, and Male Mahadeshwara Wildlife Division.

iii.The program will be further improved and gradually expanded to all divisions around the State based on experience from the departments.

14th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

India became a Member of UN-CEBD

On January 11 2025, India became a member of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (**UN-CEBD**). This membership highlights India's growing influence in the global statistical community and emphasizes its commitment to utilizing **data** and **technology** for effective policy-making.

Note: India assumed membership of the United Nations Statistical Council(UNSC) in 2024.

Key Points:

i.India's inclusion in this expert committee contributes to shaping global standards in **Big Data** and **Data Science** for official statistics and also will highlight its pioneering initiatives, including the establishment of:

- **Data Innovation Lab:** A platform to experiment with new data technologies.
- **Exploring Alternate Data Sources:** Including satellite imagery and machine learning for policy-making.

ii.Data science is a multidisciplinary field that combines statistics, mathematics, programming, and domain knowledge to extract insights from data.

iii.Big data refers to extremely large and complex datasets that traditional data processing tools and methods cannot effectively handle.

Key Goals of Membership:

i.**Aligning Domestic and Global Goals:** To align its national advances in Big Data with international objectives, positioning India as a leader in the field.

ii.**Modernizing Statistical Processes:** By incorporating non-traditional data sources like Internet of Things (**IoT**), satellite imagery, and private sector data, India aims to improve the accuracy, timeliness, and efficiency of its statistical processes.

iii.**Improving Decision-Making:** This engagement will help policymakers gain real-time, evidence-based insights, enabling better responses to socio-economic challenges.

iv.**Streamlining Statistical Production:** India's efforts will include reducing delays in data availability by innovating in data collection, processing, and analysis.

About UN-CEBD:

i.The UN-CEBD headquartered in New York, the United States of America (USA) was established in **2014** with Australia as its 1st chair. It explores the opportunities and challenges posed by **Big Data** in the production and dissemination of official statistics.

- The aim is to enhance the monitoring and reporting on Sustainable Development Goals **(SDGs)** using Big Data.

ii.The UN-CEBD consists of 31 member states and 16 international organizations.

iii.The Advisory Board is the management body of the UN-CEBD.

The Advisory Board members include South Africa (Chair), the United Kingdom (UK) , Brazil, China, Rwanda, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Canada, Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico, Netherlands, African Development Bank(AfDB), Eurostat, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific(UNESCAP) and United Nations Statistics Division(UNSD).

Union Minister Piyush Goyal launches Bharat Cleantech Manufacturing Platform in New Delhi

On 10 January 2025, Union Minister **Piyush Goyal**, Ministry of Commerce and Industry (**MoC&I**), unveiled the '**Bharat Cleantech Manufacturing Platform**', an initiative at the inaugural Bharat Climate Forum 2025 in New Delhi, Delhi.

- It aimed to enhance India's cleantech value chains in the solar, wind, hydrogen, and battery storage sectors.
- He highlighted that the Product Linked Incentives (**PLIs**) and subsidies are harmful to the long-term growth and development of the clean energy sector.

About Bharat Climate Forum 2025 :

i.It was hosted by the Centre for Indigenous Economic Understanding (CIEU) and Dalberg Advisors, the Bharat Climate Forum is supported by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, and International Solar Alliance (ISA).

ii.The Bharat Climate Forum 2025 objective is to position India as a global leader in clean technology manufacturing, with self-reliance as its foundational principle in achieving Net-Zero goals and developing into a Viksit Bharat

About Bharat Cleantech Manufacturing Platform:

i.The platform will enable Indian firms to innovate, collaborate, and attract global investments, positioning India as a global leader in the cleantech sector.

- This effort aligns with the target of 500 Gigawatt (**GW**) clean energy capacity by 2030.

ii.The platform will serve as a hub for enabling technological advancements, global partnerships, and scaling up India's clean energy infrastructure.

iii.India remains the top performer in fulfilling the Nationally Determined Contributions (NCDs) that were submitted to the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw Launches One VEGA-based SoC & Two DIR V VEGA processor based Development Boards in Maharashtra

In January 2025, Union Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw**, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) launched one VEGA-based System on-Chip (SoC) named **THEJAS64** and two DIR V VEGA processor based development boards, Artificial Intelligence for Environment & Sustainability (**ARIES**) **ECO** and **ARIES NOVA** at an event held at Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (**C-DAC**) campus in Pune, Maharashtra.

- These are designed and developed by C-DAC, as part of the Government of India (GoI)'s Digital India RISC-V Microprocessor (DIR-V) program.
- While addressing the event, the Union Minister highlighted that Computing and technological advancement is a core building block for India to become a developed nation by **2047**.

About Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC):

It is one of the premier institutions in India, which works under the MeitY.

Director General (**DG**)- Magesh Ethirajan

Headquarters- Pune, Maharashtra

Established- 1988

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Key People:

i. Krishnan, Secretary of the MeitY; Smt Sunita Verma, Group Co-ordinator (R&D), MeitY; E Magesh, Director General (DG) of C-DAC and Sanjay Wandhekar, Centre Head of C-DAC Pune along with and other senior officials

Launched Products:

i. **THEJAS64 SoC ASIC:** Fabricated at the Semiconductor Laboratory (SCL), Chandigarh (Punjab), this 64-bit single-core chip.

- It is India's 1st fully indigenous 64-bit VEGA based SoC. It is mainly designed for robust and secure embedded applications.
- It highlights India's self-reliance in advanced microprocessor technology, offering robust solutions for embedded and industrial applications.

ii. **ARIES NOVA Development Board:** Designed for Internet of Things (IoT), wearable devices, and robotics, this compact, breadboard-friendly hardware platform is powered by the VEGA ET1031 microprocessor. It offers an affordable and versatile option for developers and innovators.

- It provides an easily accessible platform for education, research, and development in the field of embedded systems.

iii. **ARIES ECO Development Board:** A cost-effective platform tailored for embedded systems enthusiasts, it features multiple communication interfaces and GPIOs, supporting standalone operation with various power options.

- It is useful to students, facilitates a hands-on-platform for experimenting with applications like sensor fusion, smart meters, and wearable devices.

About DIR-V Program:

i. In April 2022, GoI launched the DIR-V program, which aimed to develop future generations of microprocessors to achieve India's strategic priorities of mobility, computing, and digitization.

- **Key Target:** To commercialise India's 1st indigenous chipsets by 2023-24.

ii. The program is part of the GoI's Semicon India programme, which has a budget of Rs 76,000 crore to enhance India's semiconductor and display manufacturing ecosystem.

VEGA Series:

- i.**The series include 32 bit or 64 bit single/dual/quad core superscalar Out-of-Order high performance processor cores based on Reduced Instruction Set Computer (RISC-V) architecture.
- ii.**The open-source RISC-V architecture provides flexibility and innovation and promotes hands-on learning and development in embedded systems.

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BANKING & FINANCE

IBBI Mandates eBKray Platform for Liquidation Asset Auctions

On January 10, 2025, New Delhi (Delhi) based Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) mandated that all asset auctions under the liquidation process must use the 'eBKray platform (now known as Bank Asset Auction Network, BAANKET)' starting **April 01, 2025**.

- It aims to simplify the auction process, boost transparency, and increase recovery rates in liquidation cases.

Key Points:

- i.** IBBI has directed Insolvency Professionals (IPs) to list all unsold assets from ongoing liquidation cases on the eBKray platform by **March 31, 2025**, aiming to improve efficiency, accountability, and buyer access in the liquidation process.
- ii.** The IBBI has mandated this platform to address issues with manual and fragmented auctions.

About eBKray platform:

- i.** The eBKray, launched in 2019, is an advanced property listing and e-auction platform designed for banks and lending institutions.
- ii.** It helps recover non-performing asset (NPA) loans by enabling the efficient sale of distressed assets through digital auctions.

IBBI Extends Liquidation E-Forms Submission Deadline to March 31, 2025

IBBI has extended the deadline for Insolvency Professionals (IPs) to submit electronic forms on liquidation and voluntary liquidation processes to **March 31, 2025**, following concerns from liquidators and insolvency agencies about technical issues in form submission.

- This marks the second extension of the deadline by IBBI. The original deadline was September 30, 2024, which was first extended to December 31, 2024.
- Currently, IPs submit the requisite details to IBBI through electronic mails (e-mails).

About Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI):

It is a statutory body that operates under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA).

Chairperson – Ravi Mital

Headquarters – New Delhi (Delhi)

Formed – 2016

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Microsoft chairman and CEO Satya Nadella's Visit to India

Microsoft Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) **Satya Nadella** made a visit to India on **January 2025** as a part of the **Microsoft AI** (Artificial Intelligence) **Tour** with an aim for expansion and investment plans to make India a leader in AI.

- He addressed an event in **Bengaluru** on **7th** January and a similar event **New Delhi** on **8th** January.
- Satya Nadella's last visit to India was in **February 2024**.

Microsoft Research Lab launches and AI Innovations:

i.IndiaAI, an Independent Business Division (IBD) under the Digital India Corporation, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Microsoft to drive the adoption and development of artificial intelligence (AI) in India.

- MoU with India AI to skill 500,000 individuals, including students, educators, developers, and women entrepreneurs, by 2026.

ii.Establish "**AI Catalysts**," a Center of Excellence, to promote rural AI innovation in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and equip 100,000 AI innovators and developers through hackathons, community building, and an AI marketplace.

iii.The agreement also includes establishing **AI Productivity Labs** in 20 National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs)/NIELIT centers across 10 states to train 20,000 educators and empower 100,000 students with foundational AI courses in 200 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs).

About Microsoft:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- Satya Narayana Nadella

Headquarters- Washington, United States of America (USA)

Founders- Bill Gates, Paul Allen

Founded- 1975

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iv.**Microsoft Research (MSR) Lab** had announced an **AI Innovation Network** to strengthen the AI infrastructure in India. Under the AI Innovation Network, MSR will collaborate with digital users to implement the use of AI for business solutions.

iv.MSR India has collaborated with **Physics Wallah** on math reasoning and is planning to partner with other Digital Natives on topics such as causal inference, optimizing Indic Large Language Models (LLMs), prompt optimization, and reinforcement learning.

vi.Microsoft also partnered with **SaaSBoomi**, a community for Business-to-business (B2B) startups in India to boost the growth of India's AI and Software as a service (SaaS) ecosystem and develop more than **50** unicorns and soonicorns.

- It will help in upskilling over **5,000** startups, create **200,000 jobs**, and support India to achieve a trillion-dollar digital economy.

Microsoft announces USD 3 billion investment in India

Microsoft announced a **USD 3 billion** investment in India over the next **two** years to enhance AI and cloud infrastructure and skilling initiatives in India.

Moreover, the company also made various collaborations to meet this objective –

i.In healthcare, **Apollo Hospitals** partnered with Microsoft on **AI-driven research** in genomics, disease progression, and multimodal AI models that can be used globally and improve patient outcomes.

- Additionally, four AI copilots have been identified to improve clinical, operational, and administrative functions.

ii.For the public sector, **RailTel** will establish an **AI Center of Excellence** through which Microsoft will train employees in AI and cloud technologies and co-developing scalable AI solutions.

iii.In financial services, **Bajaj Finserv** will leverage **Microsoft Azure OpenAI** services to improve customer experiences, boost productivity, and reduce operational costs.

iv.In manufacturing and agriculture, **Mahindra Group** will set up an **AI Division** to involve innovation across its automotive, farming, and finance sectors by making specialized pre-trained models available on the Azure Marketplace.

v.In education, **upGrad** collaborated with Microsoft to train **1 million** learners in foundational and advanced AI skills by **2025** through the use of tools like **GitHub Copilot** and **Azure OpenAI Service**.

Other Key Points:

i.Microsoft aims to train **10 million** more Indians with essential AI skills by **2030** under its **ADVANTA(I)GE INDIA** Initiative which is part of Microsoft's Global Skills for Social Impact charter.

About Microsoft:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- Satya Narayana Nadella

Headquarters- Washington, United States of America (USA)

Founders- Bill Gates, Paul Allen

Founded- 1975

Google Cloud & UP Partner to Launch Open Network for Agriculture

In January 2025, Uttar Pradesh (**UP**) government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with **Google Cloud (India)** to launch the Gemini-powered and Beacon-enabled UP Open Network for Agriculture (**UPONA**).

- The open and decentralized network will give millions of farmers easy access to services like advice, credit, machinery, and market links to sell their produce.
- This project is **India's first** state-level initiative using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to revolutionize agriculture.

Key people: The MoU was signed by Manoj Kumar Singh, the Chief Secretary of UP, and Anil Bhansali, the Vice-President (VP) of Google Cloud (India).

i.The network is built as a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) using Google Cloud's DPI-in-a-box and the Beacon Protocol, an open standard that allows products and services to be easily discovered and accessed.

ii.It is a key step in doubling farmers' income in UP. It offers fast, accurate information on weather and market prices, using data from weather stations in nearly every tehsil.

iii.Farmers can access the network using voice commands in their preferred language. Currently, it supports Hindi, Bangla, Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati and Punjabi, with more languages to be added in the future.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Bihar Sports University Gains UGC Recognition, Set to Offer Academic Courses in Sports and Physical Education

On January 11, 2025, **Bihar Sports University**, located in Rajgir(Bihar), was **recognized** by the University Grants Commission(**UGC**) under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act, 1956, enabling it to offer academic courses in physical education and sports sciences, including undergraduate programs, diplomas, and Post Graduate (PG) diplomas.

- Retired Indian Administrative Service(IAS) officer **Shishir Sinha** has been appointed by the Bihar government as the first Vice-Chancellor (VC) of the university.

About Bihar Sports University:

The Chief Minister(**CM**) of Bihar, Nitish Kumar, **inaugurated** Bihar Sports University, the state's first sports-focused educational institution, along with the State Sports Academy (SSA) on August 29, 2023(National Sports Day).

- These initiatives, part of the International Sports Complex in Rajgir, aim to promote sports education and develop skilled sports professionals in the state.

Key Points:

i.The university is set to start its academic programs in the **2025–2026 session**. These programs will include:

- Diplomas and PG diplomas in **sports coaching**, focusing on two or three sports
- Diplomas and PG diplomas in **yoga**.
- A four-year Bachelor of Physical Education (**B.P.Ed.**) program (subject to approval from the National Council for Teacher Education(NCTE)).

ii.As per UGC regulations, the university **must appoint an Ombudsperson** within two months of starting academic activities.

- This step will ensure compliance with student grievance redressal guidelines under the UGC (Redressal of Grievances of Students) Regulations, 2023.

About Bihar:

Chief Minister (**CM**)– Nitish Kumar

Governor– Arif Mohammad Khan

Capital– Patna

Wildlife Sanctuaries– Gautam Budha Wildlife Sanctuary, Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Justin Trudeau Steps down as PM of Canada

In January 2025, Canadian Prime Minister (**PM**) **Justin Trudeau** announced his resignation to step down as Canada's PM and as leader of the **Liberal Party** after facing a stiff internal revolt. He leaves the office once a new ruling party leader is elected.

- Canada's parliament will be suspended until **24 March 2025** when a new leader is chosen.

Key Points:

i. Justin Trudeau, is the leader of the Liberal Party for 11 years and served as PM for 9 years.

ii. In 2007, he won the Liberal Party nomination for the Montréal riding of Papineau. He was elected in 2008 and re-elected in 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2021.

- He was elected Leader of the Liberal Party in April 2013.

iii. In 2015, he won a landslide victory in the federal election and became the **second-youngest PM** in Canadian history.

- He was sworn in as 23rd PM on November 4, 2015 and he successfully led the party to re-election in 2019, and again in 2021, securing a third term.

iii. He advocated for progressive issues like combating climate change and addressing historical crimes against Indigenous peoples, but the final years of his presidency have been marked by mounting economic unrest.

About Canada:

Capital – Ottawa

Currency – Canadian Dollar

Devajit Saikia Elected as Secretary of BCCI

On 12 January 2025, **Devajit Saikia**, an advocate and a former wicket-keeper batsman from Assam, was announced as the new **Secretary** of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (**BCCI**), succeeding Jay Shah who took over the role of ICC Chairman in December 2024.

- Prabhtej Singh Bhatia, cricket administrator from Chhattisgarh, was also elected as the **Treasurer** of BCCI, succeeding Ashish Shelar who was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly(MLA) in Maharashtra.
- Devajit Saikia and Prabhtej Singh Bhatia were appointed without opposition, and neither office required an election, during the BCCI Special General Meeting (SGM) held in Mumbai(Maharashtra).

About Devajit Saikia:

i.Devajit Saikia, a former first-class cricketer, represented Assam during the 1990-91 season. He played four Ranji Trophy matches, scoring 53 runs.

- After retiring from cricket, he became a practising advocate at the Guwahati High Court(HC).

ii.He has significant experience in cricket administration, having served as the Joint Secretary of BCCI and the Secretary of the Assam Cricket Association (**ACA**).

iii.He also served as the Vice-President of the ACA from 2016 to 2019, and as Secretary from 2019-2022.

iv.Currently, he has been serving as the acting interim secretary of the BCCI.

About Prabhtej Singh Bhatia:

i.Prabhtej Singh Bhatia is a young entrepreneur from Chhattisgarh in the liquor industry, is the co-founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Simba Beer.

ii.He has served as Apex Council member in BCCI's 2019-2022 tenure. He also served as a councillor for three years.

iii.Bhatia brings his expertise in finance and management to the role of BCCI Treasurer.

About Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI):

President – Roger Binny

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established – 1928

Zoran Milanović re-elected as President of Croatia for 2nd consecutive term

On January 13 2025, **Zoran Milanović**, political leader of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), was re-elected as the **5th President** of Croatia for the 2nd consecutive term.

- He won the presidential election by securing **74%** of the votes, defeating **Dragan Primorac**, a candidate from the ruling party Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).

About Zoran Milanović:

i. Zoran Milanović is a Croatian politician and Lawyer who had a prominent role in the political landscape of Croatia.

ii. He began his political career in the early 2000s when he was Science and Education Minister in the HDZ-led government.

iii. He became the leader of the SDP in 2007, During his time as party leader, he led the SDP into the 2011 parliamentary elections, in which the party won a majority, and he became the Prime Minister (PM).

- He served as the PM of Croatia from December 2011 to January 2016.

iv. He served as the President of Croatia for the **1st time** in January 2020 by defeating former president **Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović**.

v. He received numerous awards and honors, including '**the Grand Cross of the Order of the White Lion**' (highest award in the Czech Republic) and '**the Order of Prince Branimir**' for his contributions to Croatian diplomacy and governance.

About Croatia:

Prime Minister (PM)– Andrej Plenković

Capital– Zagreb

Currency– Croatian Euro (**EUR**)

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

DRDO completes HIMKAVACH Clothing System user trials for Cold Weather Military Operations

On January 10, 2025, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) announced that its **HIMKAVACH** multi-layer clothing system has successfully completed user trials in extreme cold weather conditions.

- It aims to improve soldier performance by enhancing mobility, comfort, and durability in harsh, cold environments.

i.The system is designed to protect soldiers in temperatures ranging from **+20 degree celsius (°C) to -60°C**, making it ideal for high-altitude military operations, particularly in the Himalayan region.

ii.The system features a modular, multi-layer structure, allowing soldiers to add or remove layers based on weather conditions, ensuring both comfort and mobility.

iii.Previously, the Indian Army (IA) used the Extreme Cold Weather Clothing System (**ECWCS**), a **3-layered outfit** developed by DRDO's Defence Institute of Physiology and Allied Sciences (DIPAS) which provided insulation and waterproofing and a reversible outer layer for camouflage in snowy and non-snowy terrain.

SPORTS

Bangladesh Batsman Tamim Iqbal Khan Retires from International Cricket

On January, 10, 2025, a 35-year-old **Bangladesh** left-handed batsman **Tamim Iqbal Khan** announced his retirement from all forms of International Cricket.

- This marks his second departure from the game; he initially retired in July 2023 but reversed the decision within 24 hours after intervention by Bangladesh's – Prime Minister (PM), Sheikh Hasina.

Achievement of Tamim Iqbal:

- i. Tamim debuted in One Day Internationals (ODIs) in 2007 and played his first Test in 2008.
- ii. He became the first Bangladeshi player to reach 50 half-centuries in ODIs.
- iii. He is the only Bangladeshi cricketer to score centuries in all three formats of the game.
- iv. In 2011, he was named one of the four Cricketers of the Year by Wisden Cricketers' Almanack.
- v. He has scored over 15,000 runs in his international career, the most by any Bangladeshi batsman to date.

OBITUARY

H Lakshmanan, former ED of TVS passed away

On January 10 2025, **H Lakshmanan** former Executive Director (ED) of Sundaram Clayton Limited (SCL) (now TVS Holding Limited) and the Director of Thirukkurungudi Vengaram Sundaram (TVS) Motor Company Limited passed away at the **age of 92** in Chennai, Tamil Nadu (TN). He was born in 1933 in Shenkottai, TN.

- i. H Lakshmanan was a key figure in the TVS Group spanning over 7 decades of experience. He began his career at the age 20 as a typist.
- ii. He played a crucial role in the establishment of the Padi manufacturing unit in the 1960s and worked alongside T S Srinivasan from 1960 to 1980. He served as ED of SCL from 2000 to 2015.
- iv. He also served on TVS Motors board since 2000 as one of the most trusted mentors for the automaker and retired in 2022.

IMPORTANT DAYS

National Youth Day 2025 – January 12

National Youth Day, also known as 'Rashtriya Yuva Divas' in Hindi and 'Vivekananda Jayanti', is observed annually across India on **12th January** to commemorate the birth anniversary of **Swami Vivekananda**, a Hindu spiritual leader, Philosopher, and social reformer in India, who played a crucial role in shaping modern India.

- 12 January 2025 marks the **162nd birth** anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

i.In 1984, the Government of India (GoI) declared the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda as National Youth Day to honour his teachings and ideals.

- The **first-ever** National Youth Day was observed on **12 January 1985**.

ii.On January 11 2025, Union Minister **Mansukh L Mandaviya**, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports(MYAS), inaugurated the 'Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue' at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi(Delhi).

About the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS):

Union Minister- Mansukh L. Mandaviya (Constituency- Porbandar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Raksha Nikhil Khadse (Constituency-Raver, Maharashtra)

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- 12 January 2025 marks the **162nd** birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.
- The day aims to inspire and motivate youths by promoting the life and message of him encouraging their participation in nation-building.

Background:

i.In 1984, the Government of India (**GoI**) declared the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda as National Youth Day to honour his teachings and ideals.

- The **first-ever** National Youth Day was observed on **12 January 1985**.

ii.The day highlights his teachings, inspired by 'Ramakrishna Paramahansa', to motivate and guide the youth of India.

About Swami Vivekananda:

i.Swami Vivekananda originally known as **Narendranath Dutta** was born on 12 January 1863 in Pausha Krishna Saptami Tithi, Calcutta, Bengal Presidency (Now Kolkata, West Bengal, WB).

- He was a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

ii.He dedicated his life to teach and guide the youth on the importance of social service and character-building.

iii.On 1 May 1897, he founded the **Ramakrishna Mission** and Ramakrishna Math ("monastery"), a worldwide, non-political, non-sectarian spiritual organisation with headquarters at Belur, on the banks of the Ganges (River Ganga), Kolkata.

iv.On 4 July 1902, he passed away at the age of 39 at Belur Math in WB.

2025 Events:

On January 11 2025, Union Minister **Mansukh L Mandaviya**, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports(MYAS), inaugurated the 'Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue' and the '28th National Youth Festival(NYF)' at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi(Delhi).

Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025 :

i.The 'Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025' organised by the Department of Youth Affairs(DYA) under MYAS, held on **11th and 12th** January 2025, reimagines the 'National Youth Festival' as a national youth engagement initiative aligned with the PM's call to involve 100,000 young people in leadership and civic life.

- It aims to break the 25 year old tradition of holding the NYF in a conventional manner.

ii.The event also includes plenary sessions with national and global leaders, exhibitions showcasing youth initiatives, and cultural performances highlighting "Vikas Bhi Virsat Bhi."

PM Narendra Modi participate in the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025:

On 12th January 2025, **PM** Narendra Modi participated in the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2025 and interacted with **3,000 dynamic young** leaders from across India, selected through a merit-based, multi-level process from over **30 lakh participants**.

- The young leaders presented innovative solutions for a developed India in 10 key thematic areas such as technology, sustainability, women empowerment, manufacturing and agriculture.
- The event aims to break the **25-year-old** tradition of holding the 'National Youth Festival' in a conventional manner.

About National Youth Festival 2025:

i.The NYF began in 1995 as a major activity under the program of the National Integration Camp (NIC).

ii.It is organized by the MYAS, in collaboration with one of the State Governments.

- It is held in a different state each year during National Youth Week, **12 to 16** January every year.

ii.The week commencing from the birthday of Swami Vivekananda is known as National Youth Week.

- As part of National Youth Week celebrations, the Gol holds the NYF every year, and National Youth Day is a part of this festival.

Key Schemes and Initiatives for Youth Empowerment:

i.Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS): Established in 1972, NYKS is one of the largest youth organizations globally, aiming to develop the personality of youth and involve them in nation-building activities.

ii.National Youth Corps (NYC): Launched in 2010-11, this scheme seeks to build a group of disciplined youth dedicated to national development.

iii.National Young Leaders Programme (NYLP): This program fosters leadership and innovation among youth, providing them with a platform to express their views and highlight socio-economic development issues.

iv.National Youth Awards: Recognizing exceptional contributions by youth and non-governmental organizations NGOs in nation-building.

- The awards include cash prizes, medals, and certificates, with Rs. 1 lakh to individual winners and Rs. 3 lakh to voluntary organizations.

v.National Service Scheme (NSS): Established in 1969, NSS encourages students to engage in community service, promoting social responsibility and national integration.

vi.International Cooperation: The MYAS collaborates with United Nations (UNs) Agencies like United National Development Programme (UNDP), Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to address global youth-related issues.

vii.Through these initiatives, the government continues to support youth empowerment, ensuring their active role in building a '**Viksit Bharat**' (Developed India).

About the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS):

Union Minister- Mansukh L. Mandaviya (Constituency- Porbandar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Raksha Nikhil Khadse (Constituency-Raver, Maharashtra)

STATE NEWS

Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav Launches PARTH Yojana

On January 10, 2025, Mohan Yadav, the Chief Minister (CM) of **Madhya Pradesh** (MP) launched **PARTH (Police Army Recruitment Training & Hunar) Yojana** at the State Level Youth Festival to train the youth of MP for recruitment in the Indian Army (IA), police, paramilitary forces, and other related services.

- The initiative aims to promote patriotism, skill development, and enhance employability among the state's dynamic and patriotic youth.

i. Under this scheme, candidates will receive complete pre-recruitment training, including physical fitness, coaching for written exams (covering general knowledge, mathematics, and English), and personality development.

ii. A key part of the PARTH Yojana is the **MPYP (Madhya Pradesh Youth Platform) Portal**, which aims to connect all young people in the state on a single digital platform for skill development, career guidance, and employment.

iii. The **MPYP Portal** and the **Yuva Prerak Abhiyan** together provide a comprehensive approach to youth development, ensuring that every individual has access to the resources and support needed to reach their full potential.

15th & 16th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

PM Narendra Modi Inaugurates Z-Morh Tunnel in J&K

On January 13 2025, Prime Minister **(PM) Narendra Modi** inaugurated the **Z-Morh Tunnel** in Sonamarg, located in the Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir **(J&K)**.

- The tunnel, also known as the **Sonamarg Tunnel**, enhances connectivity to the Ladakh region, which has defence and tourism value.

Key People:

Union minister Nitin Gadkari, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways(MoRTH), J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister(CM) Omar Abdullah were also present at the event.

About Z-Morh Tunnel :

i.The two lane, bi-directional Z-Morh Tunnel, measuring **6.5 kilometer** (km) long and **10 metres(m) wide** was built between Gagangir and Sonmarg on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway (NH).

- It was built at a cost of **Rs.2,700 crore** using the New Austrian Tunneling Method (**NATM**) in view of the fragile Himalayan Geology.

ii.It includes the main tunnel (10.8 m long), parallel escape tunnel (wide 7.5 km), D-shaped ventilation tunnel (8.3 m), 2 major culverts of 110 m and 270 m length, and one small culvert of 30 m long.

iii.It is located at an altitude of **8,650 feet** above sea level which facilitates all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg enroute Leh, bypassing landslide and avalanche route.

iv.The tunnel is designed for the flow of 1,000 vehicles an hour at an approved maximum speed of **80 km** per hour (km/h) enabling uninterrupted travel even during winter months.

- The western portal of the tunnel (towards Srinagar) is located in the village Rezan just after Gagangir and the eastern portal (towards Sonamarg) is located at village Shetkari.

iv.The foundation stone for the Z-Morh tunnel was laid in 2012.

- The construction work commenced in May 2015, was completed in 2023 and had its soft launch in February 2024.
- The project was initially tendered to Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Limited(IL&FS) and was re-tendered in 2019 and awarded to APCO Infratech Private Limited.

Points to Note:

i.The longest road tunnel in India – '**Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Tunnel**', also known as the 'Chenani-Nashri Tunnel' measuring 9.28 km located in J&K.

ii.The shortest road tunnel in India – '**Bhanwar Tonk Tunnel**' measuring 1,024 m located in Chhattisgarh.

C-DOT Partners with IIT Mandi and IIT Jammu to Develop Spectrum Efficiency Chip

In January 2025, the Centre for Development of Telematics (**C-DOT**), New Delhi (Delhi)-based telecom Research and Development (R&D) center under the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications (MoC) has partnered with the Indian Institute of Technology Mandi (**IIT Mandi**) in Himachal Pradesh (HP) and the Indian Institute of Technology Jammu (**IIT Jammu**) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) **to create a new chip** designed to improve spectrum efficiency.

- The project is supported by the Telecom Technology Development Fund (**TTDF**), which helps Indian startups, universities, and research institutions create telecom innovations. Its objective is to improve broadband and mobile services across India.

Note: TTDF was launched on October 1, 2022, by the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) under the Ministry of Telecommunications (MoT), for supporting R&D efforts focused on creating technologies and products that enhance telecom services in rural and remote areas.

Key People:

The agreement was signed in the presence of **Dr. Raj Kumar Upadhyay** Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of C-DOT, **Dr. Rahul Shrestha**, Principal Investigator from IIT Mandi, **Dr. Rohit B. Chaurasiya**, Co-Investigator from IIT Jammu, as well as C-DOT Directors **Pankaj Kumar Dalela** and **Shikha Srivastava**.

Key Points:

- i.** This collaboration aims to develop a "Wideband Spectrum-Sensor (**WSS**) an application-specific integrated circuit (**ASIC**) chip designed to optimize spectrum use for broadband services, particularly in rural regions. It will also generate intellectual property (IP) for spectrum sensing technology, crucial for dynamic spectrum access.
- ii.** The project includes designing an advanced spectrum sensing algorithm that helps communication systems identify unused frequency bands, or spectrum holes, without causing interference.
- iii.** The project focuses on developing hardware-efficient communication algorithms to detect underused bands **above 2 Gigahertz (GHz)**, thereby enhancing spectrum utilization.
- iv.** The project will demonstrate a wideband **cognitive radio module** for the 6 GHz satellite band (5.925–7.125 GHz) and test designs using Field-Programmable Gate Arrays (FPGA).

Indichip Semiconductors to Establish India's First Private Semiconductor Facility in AP

In January 2025, **Indichip Semiconductors Limited**, headquartered in Noida, Uttar Pradesh(UP), in collaboration with its Joint Venture (JV) partner Yitoo Micro Technology Limited (**YMTL**) from Japan, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with the government of Andhra Pradesh (**AP**) to establish **India's first** private semiconductor manufacturing facility at the Orvakal Mega Industrial Hub in Kurnool, AP.

- The project entails an investment of over Rs 14,000 crores.

Key Signatories : The MoU was signed between **Piyush Bichhoriya**, Managing Director (MD) of Indichip Semiconductors Limited, and **Saikanth Varma**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the AP Economic Development Board (APEDB).

Key Points:

i.This initiative aligns with **AP's Semiconductor Policy**, launched in November 2024, which aims to make the state a hub for electronics and semiconductor manufacturing.

- It also supports India's Aatmanirbhar Bharat vision by boosting domestic production and reducing reliance on imports.

ii.The AP government will allocate land for the facility in the Orvakal Mega Industrial Hub. The state has also committed to providing the necessary infrastructure and support to ensure the success of this project.

iii.The facility will specialize in manufacturing Silicon Carbide (**SiC**) chips, which are critical for energy-efficient technologies, Electric Vehicles (EVs), and Renewable Energy (RE) systems.

iii.Initially, the plant will produce **10,000 wafers per month**, with plans to scale up production to 50,000 wafers per month within 2-3 years.

iv.This development is anticipated to generate substantial local employment opportunities, foster advancements in technology, and play a crucial role in strengthening India's self-reliance in the semiconductor industry.

Key Facts:

- In November 2024, the Gujarat government launched India's first 'Gujarat Semiconductor Policy 2022-2027'.
- India's first semiconductor will be set up in Sanand district of Gujarat.
- India's first Artificial intelligence (AI) -enabled semiconductor fabrication plant has officially started construction in Dholera, Gujarat.

About Andhra Pradesh (AP):

Chief Minister (**CM**)– N. Chandrababu Naidu

Governor– Syed Abdul Nazeer

Capital– Amaravati

National Parks (**NP**)– Sri Venkateswara NP, Papikonda NP

28th CSPOC to be hosted in India in 2026

The 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of Parliaments of Commonwealth Countries (CSPOC) is set to be hosted in New Delhi (Delhi), India in 2026. The announcement was made by **Om Birla**, Speaker of Lok Sabha on January 10, 2025 at the CSPOC Standing Committee Meeting held in Guernsey.

- CSPOC aims to focus on the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and social media in parliamentary operations for enhancing cooperation among member countries.
- These cutting-edge technologies are used to provide regional language translations for Members of Parliament (MPs) and make available parliamentary papers in different languages.

i.India has emerged as the world's 5th-largest economy and the 3rd-largest startup ecosystem, undergoing transformative growth in sectors such as agriculture, fintech, AI, and research and innovation.

ii.India's selection as the host for the 28th CSPOC showcases its rich cultural heritage, rooted in the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, "the whole world is one family."

Note: India had hosted the CSPOC in 1970-71, 1986, and 2010.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Tracxn's Annual India Fintech Report 2024: India Ranked 3rd in Global Fintech Funding

According to Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based **Tracxn Technologies Limited**, a leading global market intelligence platform, '**Annual India Fintech Report 2024**', India ranked at **3rd** position globally in terms of funding received in the fintech segment, despite witnessing a decline of 33% on a Year-over-Year (Y-o-Y) to **USD 1.9 billion**, down from USD 2.8 billion funding garnered in 2023.

- The report highlighted that this decline in fintech industry is mainly driven by a wider slowdown in demand and geopolitical headwinds.
- As per the report, the United States of America (USA) topped the ranking globally, followed by the United Kingdom (UK) which secured 2nd position.

Top Investing Companies in Fintech Sector in 2024:

i.Top 3 Indian cities which emerged as hub for fintech funding in 2024: Bengaluru (Karnataka), Mumbai (Maharashtra) and Delhi (Delhi).

ii.Top 3 Investing Companies: Karnataka-based Peak XV Partners, LetsVenture Technologies Private Limited based in Bengaluru, Karnataka, and California (the United States of America, USA)-based Y Combinator, LLC.

About Tracxn Technologies Limited:

Managing Director (**MD**) and **Chairperson**- Neha Singh

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

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Highlights of the Report:

i. The report highlighted that fintech sector received highest funding of **USD 805 million** during the 3rd quarter (Q3) of 2024, which was 61% higher than on a Year-over-Year (Y-o-Y) basis.

- In addition to it, 59% of the total funding in 2024 was garnered during the second half (H2) of the year.
- As per the report, August emerged as the most robust month for funding in 2024, contributing USD 434 million to total funding of USD 1.9 billion.

Top Investing Companies in Fintech Sector in 2024:

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ii. **Top 3 Investing Companies:** Karnataka-based Peak XV Partners, LetsVenture Technologies Private Limited based in Bengaluru, Karnataka, and California (the United States of America, USA)-based Y Combinator, LLC.

iii. **Top 3 companies in Seed Investments:** Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Venture Catalysts Private Limited, Y Combinator LLC, and Singapore-based Antler.

iv. **Top 3 companies in Early-Stage Funding:** Gurugram (Haryana)-based Elevation Capital, Tokyo (Japan)-based GMO VenturePartners, Inc. and Peak XV Partners.

v. **Top 3 companies in Late-Stage Funding:** Karnataka-based Creaegis Investment Advisers Private Limited, USA-based The Rise Fund, and Amara Partners.

Unicorns and IPOs Emerged in 2024:

i. As per the report, Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based **Money View** and Fintech-focussed Software as a Service (SaaS) company, **Perfios** emerged as Unicorns in 2024 compared to single unicorn in 2023.

- This year, only 3 USD 100 million plus funding rounds recorded, registering a decrease of 50% from 6 such rounds in 2023. The notable deals in 2024 included DMI Finance raising USD 334 million funding led by Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG).

ii. The fintech sector recorded 8 Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) in 2024, which marks an increase of 300% compared to the 2 IPOs in 2023.

Key Findings of the Report:

ii. The report showed that Early-stage funding rounds registered a **16% decrease** Y-o-Y, from USD 667 million (in 2023) to USD 562 million (in 2024) and a 70% decline compared to USD 1.9 billion recorded in 2022.

- Also, Seed-stage funding saw a decline of 19% Y-o-Y, from USD 219 million (in 2023) to USD 178 million (in 2024) and 66% from USD 529 million in 2022.

iii. Mergers and Acquisition activity in India saw a marginal decrease of 16%, from 31 acquisitions recorded (in 2023) to 26 (in 2024).

iv. As per the report, Payment segment witnessed significant decrease of 77%, from USD 836 million (in 2023) and 81% decrease from USD 1.01 billion (in 2022) to USD 194 million (2024).

- Investment Tech Segment raised USD 320 million in funding in 2024, registering a decrease of 11% compared to USD 358 million secured in 2023.

v. The report showed that digital lending solutions received maximum funding in 2024, accounting 64% of the total funding raised during 2024.

About Tracxn Technologies Limited:

Managing Director (**MD**) and **Chairperson**- Neha Singh

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

India-Nepal IGC on Trade, Transit, and Cooperation to Combat Unauthorised Trade Held in Kathmandu, Nepal

The India-Nepal Inter-Governmental Committee (**IGC**) on Trade, Transit, and Cooperation to Combat Unauthorised Trade was held from January 10 to January 11, 2025 in Kathmandu, **Nepal**. This meeting is a bilateral mechanism which aims at bolstering trade and ties between both countries.

- Both countries carried out a comprehensive review of the whole scenario of bilateral trade and economic relationship.
- They also reviewed mutual market access issues, Intellectual Property Rights (**IPR**) and duty related issues.

i. India informed that the request of Nepal for supply of **2 lakh Metric Tonne (MT) Wheat** had been accepted by the Government of India (GoI).

ii. At the request of Nepal, India may apply the existing regulations of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (**MoRTH**) which include maximum axle weight of 18.5 tonnes for two axle vehicles and 28 tonnes for three axle vehicles to Nepali vehicles with respect to the cargo-in-transit on Kakarbhitta (Nepal)-Banglabandha (Bangladesh) via Phulbari (India) route.

iii. On the sidelines of India-Nepal IGC, the 2nd edition of Joint Business Forum (JBF) was held between India and Nepal on January 11, 2025.

About Nepal:

Prime Minister (PM)- Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli

President – Ram Chandra Poudel

Capital- Kathmandu

Currency- Nepalese Rupee (NPR)

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- Both countries carried out a comprehensive review of the whole scenario of bilateral trade and economic relationship.
- They also reviewed mutual market access issues, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and duty related issues.

Participants:

i. The Indian delegation was led by **Sunil Barthwal**, Secretary of Department of Commerce (DoC), Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I), which also included senior officials from various ministries and the Embassy of India in Nepal.

ii. **Gobinda Bahudar Karkee**, Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, represented Nepal at the meeting. He was accompanied by representatives from various ministries and departments of the Government of Nepal.

Key Highlights of India-Nepal IGC:

i. The key issues which were discussed during the meeting: review of the Treaty of Transit and The Treaty of Trade, proposed amendments to existing agreements, synchronized development of trade infrastructure including, the electrification the **Raxaul (Bihar, India)-Birgunj (Kathmandu, Nepal) rail line**.

ii. India informed that the request of Nepal for supply of **2 lakh Metric Tonne (MT) Wheat** had been accepted by the Government of India (GoI).

ii. Also, at the request of Nepal, India may apply the existing regulations of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (**MoRTH**) which include maximum axle weight of 18.5 tonnes for two axle vehicles and 28 tonnes for three axle vehicles to Nepali vehicles with respect to the cargo-in-transit on Kakarbhitta (Nepal)-Banglabandha (Bangladesh) via Phulbari (India) route.

iii. India has informed that Sal seeds and Chayote have been included in the Plant Quarantine of India.

- It has further accepted the request to include Jatamansi-Root extract; Sugandhkokila berry extracts; Sungandhwal Rhizome extract and Timur berry extracts into the list of Processed Items (Plant Products).

iv.Nepal expressed willingness to review the documentation regarding the reclassification of products like: EPAQUE and POLYHIDE 28 in their technical systems.

v.They also agreed to form a Joint Working Group(JWG) for discussion on the acceptance of Online Certificate of Origin (CoO) with Nepal and South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

vi.During the meeting, India raised concerns about the problems faced in milk exports to Nepal. Nepal agreed to consider the request of India for milk products not adequately produced in Nepal like: whey and cheese.

2nd Joint Business Forum:

i.On the sidelines of India-Nepal IGC, the 2nd edition of Joint Business Forum (JBF) was held between India and Nepal on January 11, 2025 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

- The forum was co-chaired by **N. Sethil Kumar**, Director of Pipelines, Planning & Business Development, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Bhawani **Rana**, Member of Investment Board of Nepal.

ii.It was organised by Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).

iii.This forum provides a platform to both countries to explore business opportunities on both sides and highlight their suggestions to enhance ease of doing business in the context of bilateral trade and investment.

About Nepal:

Prime Minister (**PM**)- Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli

President – Ram Chandra Poudel

Capital- Kathmandu

Currency- Nepalese Rupee (NPR)

BANKING & FINANCE

IDBI Bank launches 'Chiranjeevi-Super Senior Citizen FD'

On January 13 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) Limited launched the '**IDBI Chiranjeevi-Super Senior Citizen Fixed Deposit (FD)**' scheme. This special FD product is specifically designed for individuals aged 80 years and above, offering them higher interest rates to cater to their unique financial needs.

- The scheme provides a safe and secure investment option with guaranteed returns for super senior citizens.

Key Points:

i.The IDBI Chiranjeevi-Super Senior Citizen FD rates will remain valid only for the duration of the respective Utsav FD buckets (300 days, 375 days, 444 days, and 555 days).

Special FD Buckets & Interest Rates:

- 375 Days: 7.90% p.a. (per annum)
- 444 Days: 8.00% p.a.
- 555 Days: 8.05% p.a.
- 700 Days: 7.85% p.a.

ii.Not applicable to Non-Resident Ordinary (NRO) or Non-Resident External (NRE) term deposits.

iii.Premature withdrawal and closure are allowed but will incur a penalty of 1% on the applicable rate. All other terms and conditions of the FD will remain unchanged and applicable to this scheme as well.

Note:

i.IDBI Bank also offers Utsav Callable FD scheme, which has varied interest rates based on the tenure.

- A recent addition is the 555-day tenure offering 7.40% for general citizens and 7.90% for senior citizens which will be available until **March 31, 2025**.

About Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI):

Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Rakesh Sharma

Headquarters– Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established– July 01,1964

Tagline–'Banking for all, Aao Sochein Bada' & 'Bank Aisa Dost Jaisa'

PNB Launches 1st 'Cybersecurity Hackathon 2024-25' to Combat Malware Threats

On January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Punjab National Bank (**PNB**) launched its 1st-ever '**Cybersecurity Hackathon 2024-25**' with the theme "**Code Against Malware**". The hackathon aims to combat the increasing threat of malware by inviting innovators, researchers, and academicians from across India.

- The aim is to strengthen the nation's cybersecurity defence in the banking sector by developing state-of-the-art solutions to detect, mitigate & prevent malware attacks.
- This hackathon is being held under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and in line with the Department of Financial Services (**DFS**) directive for Public Sector Banks (**PSBs**) to host annual hackathons issued on **December 9, 2024**.

i.The hackathon will focus on the key

areas including Intelligence-powered malware detection & removal, Real-time threat monitoring & mitigation, Ransomware resilience solution & Next-generation antivirus tools and attack surface management.

ii.The competition is open to students, researchers, and academicians, either individually or in teams.

iii.Winners will receive prizes worth up to **Rs 11 lakhs** and have the opportunity to implement their solutions in live environments with PNB.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

BHEL and ONGC Signed MoU to Collaborate on RE Projects

In January 2025, New Delhi (Delhi)-based Bharat Heavy Electronics Limited (**BHEL**), a leading Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) and New Delhi -based 'Maharatna' CPSE, Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited (**ONGC**) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to explore collaboration in the area of New and Renewable Energy (NRE) sector.

i.As per the MoU, this strategic partnership will focus on key areas of NRE such as: fuel cell, electrolyser and battery energy storage system projects.

ii.Both Public Sector entities will leverage the combined strengths for promoting innovations in the clean energy ecosystem and will also support India's National Green Hydrogen Mission(NGHM).

- This partnership marks a significant step in aligning India's RE targets and promoting the adoption of clean energy solutions.

APSSDC Partners with Infosys to Bridge Skill Gaps in AP

In January 2025, The Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (**APSSDC**) partnered with Bengaluru(Karnataka) based **Infosys Limited**, to enhance **employment prospects** and provide technical assistance for the Skill Census programme.

- The agreement was signed between the officials of the APSSDC and representatives of Infosys Limited in the presence of Nara Lokesh, Minister for Human Resource Development and Information Technology (IT), along with Kona Sashidhar, Secretary of APSSDC , and other senior officials from both APSSDC and Infosys.

Note: The skill census is a first-of-its-kind initiative of the AP government to assess the skill set and competencies of 35 million people in the state's working-age population.

i.As a part of the partnership, Infosys will develop a generative Artificial Intelligence(**AI**)-**powered digital platform** to evaluate the skills of 3.59 crore individuals aged 15-59 years in AP. This platform will assess current skill levels, identify gaps, and provide tailored recommendations for further development.

ii.The Infosys **Springboard initiative** will offer free online courses, workshops, and learning pathways to support continuous skill development. Using advanced technology, it will enable transparent evaluations to track progress and align training with career goals.

iii. As part of the skill census, Infosys will provide technical support at no cost, linking skill assessments to job opportunities.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

PV Sindhu appoints PUMA India as brand ambassador

On January 13 2025, Global sportswear brand **PUMA India** has officially partnered with two-time Olympic medalist Pusalra Venkata **(PV) Sindhu** in a multi-year collaboration as **brand ambassador**. The collaboration is aimed at utilizing the sport's popularity in India.

- This marks official entry of PUMA India into the badminton sector with PV Sindhu being the **first** badminton player to promote the German sportswear giant.

i. She is now a part of PUMA's exclusive list of athletes and icons, including cricketers Harmanpreet Kaur and Mohammed Shami, Olympian Sarabjot Singh, Paralympian Avani Lekhara, and international legends like Usain Bolt and Neymar Junior.

ii. PV Sindhu is the first Indian to win **five** badminton world championship medals and is victorious across the Olympics, Commonwealth Games and Asian Games.

- She has been awarded with the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna(2016), the Padma Shri(2015), the Padma Bhushan(2020), and the Arjuna Award(2013) for her contributions in the field of sport.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

China launches 'Shijian-25' satellite to test orbital refueling in space

In January 2025, **China** successfully launched the '**Shijian-25**' satellite into Geostationary Transfer Orbit(GTO) aboard a **Long March 3B** rocket marking its first space mission of 2025.

- The launch took place from the **Xichang Satellite Launch Center** in southwest China. This launch marked China's first rocket launch in 2025 and the 555th mission of Long March series carrier rockets.
- The satellite is been developed by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology (**SAST**), to conduct tests related to developing technologies for **in-orbit refueling** and extending the operational lifespan of satellites.

Note:The Long March 3B rocket is one of the primary vehicles of China for launching payloads into GTO since its introduction in **1996**.

Key Highlights:

i.The mission follows the **2021** launch of the **Shijian-21** space debris mitigation satellite which was also developed by SAST.

ii.It will support China in enhancing sustainability and reduce costs in space operations.

- The satellite is primarily used for the verification of satellite fuel replenishment and life extension service technologies.

iii.The satellites feature sophisticated Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) technology, enabling high-resolution imagery and precise spatial data collection.

In addition to Shijian-25, China is going to conduct numerous other missions throughout 2025, including crewed missions to its **Tiangong space station** and the **Tianwen-2** asteroid sample return mission.

About China:

President– Xi Jinping

Capital– Beijing

Currency – Renminbi

SPORTS

Spanish Super Cup: FC Barcelona defeats Real Madrid to win 15th title

In January 2025, **Futbol Club(FC) Barcelona**, defeated **Real Madrid** by 5-2 to win the **41st** edition of **Spanish Super Cup** (also known as Supercopa de España) Clasico final held at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium in **Jeddah, Saudi Arabia**.

- The tournament was held from **8th** January to **12th** January 2025.
- Barcelona has won the Spanish Cup for the **15th** time after this win which is two more than Real Madrid (13).

i.The Supercopa de Espana 2025 has a prize money pool of **USD 20.7 million**.

- FC Barcelona and Real Madrid will receive USD 6.2 million while Athletic Bilbao will receive around USD 2.1 million and RCD Mallorca will get USD 880,150.

ii.In addition to the prize money, the champions of the tournament will be rewarded with USD 2.1 million, and the runners-up with USD 1 million.

Note: FC Barcelona won their first Super Cup in **1983-84** – that has been followed by wins in 1991-92, 1992-93, 1994-95, 1996-97, 2005-06, 2006-07, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2013-14, 2016-17, 2018-19, 2022-23 and now 2024-25.

OBITUARY

Senior Advocate Iqbal M Chagla passed away

In January 2025, **Iqbal M Chagla**, senior advocate and one of India's leading lawyer, passed away at the age of 85 in Mumbai, Maharashtra. He was born on March 7 1939 in Mumbai.

- He was the son of M C Chagla, the **1st permanent** Chief Justice of India (CJI) of the Bombay High Court (BHC), Mumbai from 1948-58.

i.Iqbal Chagla was a distinguished Indian lawyer, known for his exceptional legal acumen, integrity, and leadership.

ii.He began his career as an advocate at the BHC, under the mentorship of Kharshedji Hormasji Bhabha. He was conferred as the Senior Advocate at the age of 39 in 1979.

iii.He served as the President of the Bombay Bar Association (BBA) for 3 times from 1990 to 1999.

- He also served as a Member of the Executive Committee of the Bar Association of India (BBI), as well as the National Legal Services Authority (NLSA), New Delhi (Delhi).

STATE NEWS

Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren Launches Maiyyaan Sampan Yojana

In January 2025, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren launched the **enhanced 'Maiyan Samman Yojana'** in Namkum(Jharkhand) by transferring assistance for two months totalling Rs 5,000 each to the accounts of over 56.61 lakh women beneficiaries.

- Initially launched in **August 2024**, the scheme provided Rs 1,000 per month to women aged 18 to 50.

ii.From December 2024, the Government of Jharkhand enhanced the financial assistance to **Rs 2,500 per month**, offering stronger support to women beneficiaries.

iii.To be eligible for the scheme, the applicant must be a female and a resident of Jharkhand.

iv.The applicant must not have a spouse or herself employed in the Central/State Government, Public Sector Undertakings,(PSUs), local bodies, government-aided institutions, or receiving a pension.

17th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

TRAI Released Draft Telecommunication Tariff (71st Amendment) Order, 2025 to Boost PM-WANI Scheme

On January 15 2025, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (**TRAI**) under the Ministry of Communications (MoC) released a '**Draft Telecommunication Tariff (71st Amendment) Order, 2025**' which proposes the rationalization of broadband tariffs for Public Data Offices (**PDOs**) under the Prime Minister's Wireless Fidelity(Wi-Fi) Access Network Interface (**PM-WANI**) scheme.

- The main objective of this draft is to address the challenges obstructing the growth of public Wi-Fi hotspots and ensure affordable connectivity for users across the country.

Background:

i. In August 2024, TRAI released the Draft Telecommunication Tariff (70th Amendment) Order, 2024, which suggested that broadband tariffs for PDOs under the PM-WANI scheme be aligned with retail broadband tariffs.

ii. Later, On September 16 2024, the DoT introduced some key amendments to the PM-WANI framework like: eliminating the requirement for PDOs to enter commercial agreements with Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) for internet connectivity and PDOs were allowed to network up to 100 access points to set-up single Wi-Fi hotspot.

Key Points:

i. The regulator has proposed that the broadband tariff i.e. Fiber to the Home (FTTH) for PDOs under the PM-WANI scheme **should not be more than twice** the tariff applicable for retail broadband (Fiber to the home , FTTH) services of corresponding capacity offered by service providers.

- This move aimed to boost the effective proliferation of PM-WANI hotspots and will foster sustainable ecosystem that ensures a balanced relationship between PDOs and service providers.

ii. PM-WANI scheme aimed to contribute to the wider objectives of the National Digital Communications Policy, 2018 and Bharat 6G Vision, and has set the target for the deployment of **50 million** public wi-fi hotspots by **2030**.

- As of July 2024, there are 207,642 PM-WANI Wi-Fi hotspots deployed in India.

About PM-WANI:

i.It was launched by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications (MoC) in **2020**.

ii.It aims to establish public wi-fi networks by Public Data Office Aggregators (PDOAs) to provide public wi-fi services through PDOs across the country.

- It will also boost proliferation of broadband internet services through public wi-fi networks in the country.

iii.Under the scheme, PDOs will set-up, operate, and maintain WANI compliant Wi-Fi hotspots based on their techno-commercial considerations and deliver internet services to subscribers.

iv.As on December 15 2024, number of unique PM-WANI users in the country are 18,19,674 and total data consumed is 58.55 petabytes (PB).

About Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI):

It is a statutory body established under the TRAI Act, 1997. It works under the DoT, MoC.

Chairman- Anil Kumar Lahoti

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 1997

Odisha Becomes the 34th State in the Country to Implement Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY Scheme

In January 2025, the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Odisha signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with the National Health Authority (**NHA**), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) for the implementation of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (**AB PM-JAY**) in Odisha.

- With this, Odisha became the **34th** state in the country to implement AB PM-JAY.
- The MoU was signed between **LS Changsan**, Additional Secretary, MoHFW and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of NHA and **Aswasthy S**, Commissioner-cum—Secretary of the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Odisha at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi (Delhi).

i.As per the MoU, AB PM-JAY will be implemented in convergence with the existing Gopabandhu Jan Arogya Yojana (GJAY) in Odisha.

ii.The scheme will offer a health insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per annum with additional Rs 5 lakh for women members.

About Ministry of Health and Family Welfare(MoHFW):

Union Minister- Jagat Prakash Nadda (Rajya Sabha – Gujarat)

Union Minister of State (MoS)- Anupriya Patel(Constituency- Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, UP);
Jadhav Prataprao Ganpatrao (Constituency- Buldhana, Maharashtra)

In January 2025, the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of **Odisha** signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with the National Health Authority (**NHA**), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) for the implementation of Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (**AB PM-JAY**) in Odisha.

- With this, Odisha became the **34th** state in the country to implement AB PM-JAY.

Note: At present, 26 states and 18 Union Territories (UTs) have signed the MoU with NHA for the implementation of AB PM-JAY in their respective states and UTs except, Union Territory Delhi and West Bengal(WB).

Signatories:

i.The MoU was signed between **LS Changsan**, Additional Secretary, MoHFW and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of NHA and **Aswasthy S**, Commissioner-cum—Secretary of the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Odisha at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi (Delhi).

ii.Union Minister **Jagat Prakash Nadda**, MoHFW presided over the signing ceremony. Charan Manjhi, Chief Minister (CM) of Odisha; Dharmendra Pradhan, Ministry of Education (MoE); Jual Oram, Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA); Ashwini Vaishnaw, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and other senior officials from both centre and state governments were also present at the event.

About MoU:

i.As per the MoU, AB PM-JAY will be implemented in convergence with the existing Gopabandhu Jan Arogya Yojana (GJAY) in Odisha.

ii.The scheme will offer a health insurance cover of **Rs 5 lakh** per family per annum with additional Rs 5 lakh for women members.

iii.A total of nearly 1.03 crore families will be covered under the converged scheme, of which 67.8 lakh families will be supported by the central government.

About AB PM-JAY:

i. The scheme is one of the key components of Ayushman Bharat (AB), a flagship scheme of Government of India (GoI), which emerged from the National Health Policy 2017.

- It was launched on 23rd September, 2018 by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

ii. AB PM-JAY is the largest health assurance scheme in the world which offers a cashless health cover of **Rs 5 lakh per family per year** for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization across public and private empanelled hospitals in India.

- Key Target: To cover **12 crore families** i.e. around 55 crore beneficiaries across India.

iii. The scheme covers all members of eligible families irrespective of their family size, age, or gender, which ensures inclusivity for all.

iv. In October 2024, PM Narendra Modi launched Ayushman Bharat: Vaya Vandana Card (**AB-VVC**), expansion of AB PM-JAY which offers comprehensive health coverage to all the **senior citizens aged 70 years and above**.

v. AB PM-JAY is fully digitized and has covered nearly 45% of India's population.

- Since the inception of scheme in 2018, **8.19 crore** hospital admissions have been recorded, with **Rs 1.13 lakh crore** spent on providing healthcare to marginalized sections of society.

About Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW):

Union Minister- Jagat Prakash Nadda (Rajya Sabha – Gujarat)

Union Minister of State (**MoS**)- Anupriya Patel (Constituency- Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, UP);

Jadhav Prataprao Ganpatrao (Constituency- Buldhana, Maharashtra)

IMD Celebrated its 150th Foundation Day

On January 15 2025, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (**MoES**) celebrated its **150th** Foundation Day. A series of events, activities and workshops were organised which demonstrated the contributions of IMD in making India climate-resilient and providing critical weather and climate services.

- Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi attended the celebrations held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, Delhi.

i. During the event, PM launched '**Mission Mausam**', an initiative aimed to transform India into a 'Weather-Ready' and 'Climate-smart' country through advanced weather surveillance technologies, high-resolution atmospheric observations, among others.

ii. He released commemorative postage stamp and coin to mark the 150 years of IMD.

- The coin is circular in shape with a denomination of **Rs 150**. It has been minted in 99.99% silver and weighs 40 grams (gms).

iii. He also unveiled a vision document titled "**IMD Vision 2047**" which outlines a framework for weather resilience and climate change adaptation as India prepares to mark 100 years of independence in 2047.

About India Meteorological Department (IMD):

Director General (**DG**)- Dr. Mrutyunjay Mohapatra

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 1875

About Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES):

Union Minister of State (**MoS**) (Independent Charge, IC)- Dr. Jitendra Singh (Constituency- Udhampur, Jammu & Kashmir, J&K)

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- Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi attended the celebrations held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, Delhi.

Key People: Union Minister of State (MoS) (Independent Charge, IC) **Dr. Jitendra Singh**, MoES; Professor Celeste Saulo, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) were present among the other key dignitaries at the event.

Key Highlights of the Event:

i. During the event, PM launched '**Mission Mausam**', an initiative aimed to transform India into a 'Weather-Ready' and 'Climate-smart' country through advanced weather surveillance technologies, high-resolution atmospheric observations, among others.

- The Government of India (GoI) approved Mission Mausam in September 2024, with a budget outlay of 2,000 crores over two years.

ii. He also released **commemorative postage stamp of Rs.5 denomination and coin** to mark the 150 years of IMD.

- The coin is circular in shape with a denomination of **Rs 150**. It has been minted in 99.99% silver and weighs 40 grams (gms).
- On the obverse side of the coin, 'satyamev jayate' is inscribed in Hindi below the Lion Capital of Ashoka Pillar at its centre.
- The coin's periphery is inscribed with 'Bharat' in Hindi on its left and India on the right.
- The reverse side of the coin has the special logo marking the 150 years of IMD. The lower periphery of the coin is inscribed with '150 Years of India Meteorological Department and the year 1875-2025 is written below the logo in international numbers.

iii. He also unveiled a vision document titled "**IMD Vision 2047**" which outlines a framework for weather resilience and climate change adaptation as India prepares to mark 100 years of independence in 2047.

- It also outlines targets for the next two years, the next 10 years (by 2035) and the next 22 years (by 2047), considering advancements in science and technology.
- According to the document, released on the eve of the IMD's 150th anniversary, the weather department targets 100% forecast accuracy for up to three days, 90% for up to five days, 80% for up to seven days and 70% for up to 10 days, covering all severe weather events at the block and panchayat levels.

iv. IMD also organised a '**Undivided India' (Akhand Bharat) seminar** as part of the celebration.

About IMD:

i.IMD was established on **January 15, 1875** during the British-colonial era. Since, its inception in 1875, IMD has played a vital role in advancing meteorology as a physical science.

ii.It has been playing an important role in alleviating the impact of natural disaster, supporting agriculture, water management, aviation, public safety and other key sectors and contributing to the socio-economic development of India and the wider region.

iii.It has 6 Regional Meteorological Centres: Mumbai(Maharashtra), Chennai(Tamil Nadu, TN), New Delhi(Delhi), Kolkata(West Bengal, WB), Nagpur(Maharashtra) and Guwahati(Assam).

Key Accomplishments of IMD:

i.Pioneering Weather Observations: By 2023, IMD has replaced all mercury barometers with digital barometers according to the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Minamata Convention at all Class-I observations.

- Improved agro-meteorological services with the deployment of 200 AGRO Automatic Weather Stations(AWS) stations.
- Sustenance of 25 Global Positioning System (GPS) based PB stations in which 5 stations equipped with IMD manufactured and 20 are outsourced from Indian manufacturers.

ii.Communication and Outreach: In 2021, IMD launched its Crowdsourcing web interface and the mobile application (app) 'Public Observation' on 14th January, 2022, which permits the users to provide their weather feedback at anytime from anywhere.

- Since 2021, IMD has started an online platform to collect information of the weather that has occurred and also the associated impact information for 6 weather events initially: rain, hail, duststorm, wind speed, thunderstorm or lightning and fog.

iii.Advances in Numerical Weather Prediction: Overall forecast accuracy saw an improvement of 40% in 2023 as compared to 2014.

- Doppler Weather Radar (DWR) network has expanded from 15 (in 2014) to 39 (in 2023) with land area of coverage increased by about 35% from 2014.
- With the precise cyclone warning by IMD, the number of deaths has decreased from 10,000(in 1999) to 0 (in 2020-24).

iv. Technological Advancements: High-Resolution Rapid Refresh (HRRR) model for Nowcasting of Rainfall & Reflectivity forecasts.

- In January 2024, Vice President (VP) of India Jagdeep Singh Dhankar launched Mausamgram, an interactive and dynamic meteogram which provides location specific weather forecasts for public usage.
- The number of Automatic Rain Gauges (ARG) has increased from 1350 (in 2014) to 1382 (in 2023).

About India Meteorological Department (IMD):

Director General **(DG)**- Dr. Mrutyunjay Mohapatra

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 1875

About Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES):

Union Minister of State **(MoS)** (Independent Charge, IC)– Dr. Jitendra Singh (Constituency- Udhampur, Jammu & Kashmir, J&K)

Union Minister Piyush Goyal launches National Turmeric Board with Palle Ganga Reddy as chairman

In January 2025, Union Minister **Piyush Goyal**, Ministry of Commerce and Industry(MoC&I), launched the **National Turmeric Board** (NTB) in New Delhi, Delhi with an aim to boost the turmeric industry in India.

- **Palle Ganga Reddy** has been appointed as its first Chairperson. The headquarters of the Board has been set up at **Nizamabad, Telangana**.

i. The NTB will function under the Department of Commerce(DoC), MoC&I. The board will include representatives from Ministry of AYUSH(Ayurveda, Yoga, and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy); Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) under Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers (MoCF), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers(MoC&F); Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare(DA&FW) under Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfar(MoA&FW) and Department of Commerce, MoC&I.

ii. It will provide leadership, coordinate with other Government Departments/Agencies for the growth and development of the Turmeric sector in the country.

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I):

Union Minister – Piyush Goyal (Constituency – Mumbai North, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (MoS) – Jitin Prasada (Constituency – Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

In January 2025, Union Minister **Piyush Goyal**, Ministry of Commerce and Industry(MoC&I), launched the **National Turmeric Board** (NTB) in New Delhi, Delhi with an aim to boost the turmeric industry(Golden Spice) in India.

- **Palle Ganga Reddy** has been appointed as its first Chairperson. The headquarters of the Board has been set up at **Nizamabad, Telangana**.
- Union Minister of State(MoS) Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Ministry of Home Affairs(MHA) and Arvind Dharmapuri, Member of Parliament(MP), Nizamabad also participated in the event.

About National Turmeric Board (NTB):

i.The NTB will function under the Department of Commerce (DoC), MoC&I. The board will include representatives from Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy); Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) under Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers (MoCF), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers (MoC&F); Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (DA&FW) under Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW) and Department of Commerce, MoC&I.

- Moreover, representatives from the top turmeric growing states of **Maharashtra**, **Telangana** and **Meghalaya** will also be part of the Board.

ii.The board will look into the challenges faced by turmeric farmers across **20** states, including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu (TN), Andhra Pradesh (AP), Telangana, Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Meghalaya.

iii.It will provide leadership, coordinate with other Government Departments/Agencies for the growth and development of the Turmeric sector in the country.

- It will work on increasing **trade** of turmeric and its products, especially in view of its health and wellness benefits.

iv.Moreover, the new Board will promote **research** and **development** of new turmeric products, add value to the **export** related turmeric products and create awareness on the essential and medical properties of turmeric.

- It will also help in increasing its yield and boost logistics and supply chain to promote trade into newer markets and will also ensure quality and safety standards of turmeric production and exports.

Points to Note:

i.According to the Spice Board of India, an area of **3.05 lakh hectare** was under turmeric cultivation in India in **2023-24** with a production of **10.74 lakh tons**.

- During 2023-24, **1.62 lakh tons** of turmeric and turmeric products valued at **USD 226.5 million** were exported.

ii.There are **30** varieties of turmeric produced with India being the largest producer, consumer and exporter of turmeric in the world and has more than **62%** share of world trade.

iii.The top turmeric-producing states in India are Maharashtra (325643 tonnes), Telangana (117049 tonnes) and Karnataka (129399 tonnes).

iv.The top buyers of Indian turmeric in 2023-24 are Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Malaysia.

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I):

Union Minister – Piyush Goyal (Constituency – Mumbai North, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – Jitin Prasada (Constituency – Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

INROAD Project Received Rs 100 Crore to Enhance Natural Rubber Quality in Northeast India

In January 2025, the Indian Natural Rubber Operations for Assisted Development (**INROAD**) project received financial support of **Rs 100 crore** for improving the quality of natural rubber in **Northeast** India.

- INROAD is the world's first project in which the tyre industry directly contributes to the growth of rubber plantations. The project also focuses on women's economic empowerment in rubber cultivation.

i.It was implemented by the Rubber Board of India and financially supported by four members of Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA), including Apollo Tyres Limited, CEAT Limited, JK Tyre & Industries Limited, and MRF Tyres.

ii.New Natural Rubber (NR) plantations across **94 districts** in the Northeast and parts of West Bengal(WB) covered **1,25,272 hectares** in the first four years of the project.

iii.Under the project, skill-based training will be provided through digital mode, and infrastructure will be built, including Model Smoke Houses and Model Processing and Grading Centres that are tailor-made for the region.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju's visit to Saudi Arabia from 11th to 14th January, 2025

Union Minister **Kiren Rijiju**, Ministry of Minority Affairs(MoMA) and Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs(MoPA) visited **Saudi Arabia** from **11th January to 14th January 2025** with an aim to look into the important arrangements related to preparations for the upcoming Haj pilgrimage to enhance the experience of Indian pilgrims.

- The visit involved signing a Bilateral Agreement for Haj 2025, attending the Hajj & Umrah Conference and Exhibition, bilateral meetings with Saudi officials and reviewing preparations being made for the Indian Haj pilgrims at Jeddah and Madinah.

4th edition of the Hajj & Umrah Conference and Exhibition:

The Union Minister attended the inaugural session of the 4th edition of the Hajj and Umrah Conference and Exhibition which was organized by the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

- This international conference is organized annually wherein sessions and workshops are conducted by key decision makers, experts and researchers in the Haj & Umrah services sector and provide opinions on the suitable practices and facilitate exchange of ideas and information.

India and Saudi Arabia Sign Hajj Agreement to Secure Quota for Indian Pilgrims:

i. On 13th January 2025, **India** signed a **Hajj agreement** with **Saudi Arabia** securing a quota of 1,75,025 pilgrims for Indian pilgrims for 2025.

- The agreement was signed between **Kiren Rijiju** and Saudi Arabia's Minister for Hajj and **Umrah Tawfiq Bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah** in Jeddah.

ii. As per the Haj Policy 2025, 30% of India's total Hajj quota, or 52,507 slots, will be allocated to private Haj Group Organizers (HGOs), while 70% will be provided to the Haj Committee of India (HCoI).

- In the last five years, the quota distribution between HCoI and HGOs has varied between 70:30 and 80:20.

About Saudi Arabia

Prime Minister (**PM**) – Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

Capital– Riyadh

Currency– Saudi Riyal(SAR)

BANKING & FINANCE

NPCI International partners with Magnati to Expand UPI Acceptance in UAE

NPCI International Payments Limited (**NIPL**), the international arm of the National Payments Corporation of India (**NPCI**), has partnered with **Magnati**, a leading payment solutions provider in the Middle East, to provide the feature of **QR** (Quick Response) based Unified Payments Interface (**UPI**) merchant payments via Magnati's Point-Of-Sale (POS) terminals in the United Arab Emirates (**UAE**).

- The partnership aims to expand the QR based merchant payment network to more merchants in the UAE which will facilitate seamless payment options to more than **12 million** Indians travelling to Dubai and the UAE annually.

i.UPI acceptance will be initially provided across **Dubai Duty Free**, enhancing the shopping and payment experience for Indian tourists.

ii.It will further be expanded to other key merchant categories including retail, hospitality, transport, and supermarkets etc.

Note: UPI payments are accepted in **seven** countries, including Bhutan, Mauritius, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, France and the UAE.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

CCI Approved Proposed Acquisition of 34% Shareholding of Ashoka Concessions by Ashoka Buildcon

In January 2025, the Competition Commission of India (**CCI**) approved the proposed acquisition of **34%** shareholding of Ashoka Concessions Limited (**ACL**), the infrastructure arm of the Ashoka Group by Ashoka Buildcon Limited (**ABL**), which mainly engaged in engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) in various sectors and operation and maintenance (O&M) .

- On the completion of this acquisition, ACL will become a wholly-owned subsidiary of ABL, which already owns 66% shares of ACL.

i.CCI has also approved the acquisition of certain convertible instruments of ACL by ABL and Nashik (Maharashtra)-based Viva Highways Limited (Viva), a subsidiary of ABL.

ii.Additionally, Viva will acquire **26%** shareholding of Jaora Naygaon Toll Road Company Limited(JTCL), a Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) concessionaire worth Rs 150 crore.

iii.Madhya Pradesh Road Development Corporation Limited(MPRDC) has granted concession to JN for reconstruction, strengthening, widening, and rehabilitation of 125 kilometer (km) to 250 km of State Highway (SH)-31in Madhya Pradesh (MP).

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Singapore Confers Honorary Citizen Award on former CII head Mr Tarun Das

Singapore has awarded **Tarun Das**, former Director General of the **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)**, the **Honorary Citizen Award** for his outstanding contributions to Singapore and **Singapore-India relations**.

- The award was presented by Singapore President **Tharman Shanmugaratnam** at a ceremony held in **New Delhi** on **15th January 2025**.
- Tarun Das is the **second** Indian to receive Singapore's honorary citizenship after late **Ratan Tata**, former chairman of the Tata Group who was conferred the same award in **2008**.

About Tarun Das:

i. Tarun Das served as the Director General (DG) and Chief Mentor of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) for over **40** years.

- He is the Founding Trustee of the Ananta Centre and Ananta Aspen Centre, Director of the Singapore-India Partnership Foundation (SIPF), and a Member of the India-Singapore Strategic Dialogue (ISSD).

ii. He was the first to lead a delegation of Indian industrialists to visit Singapore in **1993**, as part of India's "**Look East**" policy that initiated the annual visits to Singapore by the CII Leadership team to include Singapore's political leadership and businesses for development in both the countries.

iii. He also played a crucial role in the establishment of the **annual ISSD**, which is a key platform that brings together business leaders, policymakers, and academia to discuss upon strengthening Singapore-India cooperation.

iv. As Director of the SIPF, he contributed in strengthening youth and academic exchanges, and private sector collaboration including **SIPF Students Immersion Programme** to India in 2023 involving students from the Singapore University of Social Sciences.

v. Tarun Das was also awarded with the **Singapore Public Service Medal** in **2004**.

About the Honorary Citizen Award:

- i.**The title of Honorary Citizen is a national award established in **2003** by the Singapore Government to recognize and acknowledge the contributions of **non-Singaporeans** who have given invaluable contributions to Singapore and its people, or who have led significant impact in the areas of business, science and technology, information communications, education, health, arts and culture, sports, tourism and community services or security.
- ii.**It is the highest form of national recognition for a non-Singaporean.

About Singapore:

President – Tharman Shanmugaratnam

Capital -Singapore

Currency – Singapore Dollar(SGD)

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

ACC Approves Ashok Chandra as PNB MD & CEO, Binod Kumar as Indian Bank MD & CEO

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (**ACC**) has approved the appointment of **Ashok Chandra** as the Managing Director (**MD**) and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) of Punjab National Bank (PNB) and **Binod Kumar** as the MD and CEO of Indian Bank (IB). .

- Both appointments are for a tenure of three years, effective from the date they assume charge, or until further orders. Binod Kumar tenure may be extended by an additional two years after a performance review.
- Ashok Chandra succeeds Atul Kumar Goel, who retired on December 31, 2024. Binod Kumar takes over from Shanti Lal Jain, who also retired on December 31, 2024.

Note: The appointments were recommended by the Financial Services Institutions Bureau (**FSIB**), a part of the Department of Financial Services. The FSIB is chaired by Bhanu Pratap Sharma.

About Ashok Chandra:

- Holds a postgraduate degree in Economics and began his banking career in 1991 with Corporation Bank as a Probationary Officer (PO).
- He is a Certified Associate of the Indian Institute of Bankers (CAIIB). He also served as director in the Board of The Union Trustee Company Private Limited and as a Director in The National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL).
- He served as Executive Director (**ED**) at **Canara Bank Limited** before being appointed as MD and CEO of PNB.

About Binod Kumar:

- Holds a Postgraduate (PG) Diploma in Banking & Finance from the National Institute of Bank Management (NIBM) and is certified as a Financial Risk Manager (FRM) by the Global Association of Risk Professionals (GARP), United States of America (USA).
- He is also a Certified Associate Member of the Indian Institute of Bankers (CAIIB).
- Before his appointment as MD and CEO of Indian Bank, he served as the **ED** at **PNB**.

About Punjab National Bank (PNB):

Established- 1894

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Tagline- The Name You Can Bank Upon

About Indian Bank (IB):

Established- 1907

Headquarters- Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Tagline- Your own bank

RBI Assigns Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao to head monetary policy

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has redesigned portfolios of its deputy governors as the 5-year term with two one-year extended tenure of **Dr. Michael Debabrata Patra** ended on **14th January 2025**.

- The central bank has reshuffled its **33** departments among the **three** deputy governors - Rajeshwar Rao, T Rabi Sankar and Swaminathan Janakiraman.

i.The key **Monetary Policy department** under Michael Debabrata Patra was given to Deputy Governor **M Rajeshwar Rao**.

- M Rajeshwar Rao will handle **11** portfolios – Co-ordination, Department of Communication, Department of Economic and Policy Research, Department of Regulation, Department of Statistics and Information Management, Enforcement Department, International Department, Legal Department, Monetary Policy Department, Risk Monitoring Department and Secretary's Department.

ii.**Rabi Sankar** will look after **13** departments, including Currency Management, Information Technology, Financial Markets Operations and Financial Markets Regulation.

iii.**Swaminathan Janakiraman** will look after **9** departments, including Supervision and Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC).

iv.Dr. Michael Debabrata Patra was first appointed as the RBI deputy governor in 2020 for three years. In 2023, his term was extended by one year and by another year in 2024.

- He was a member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) since it was established in 2016.

Note: The RBI has four deputy governors, an economist to oversee the monetary policy department, one commercial banker, and two from within the ranks.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

India Test Fired Its First Indigenous Micro-Missile System Named Bhargavastra

In January 2025, Economic Explosives Limited (**EEL**), a subsidiary of Nagpur, Maharashtra-based Solar Industries India Limited, successfully **test-fired India's first guided micro-missiles** as part of its '**Bhargavastra**' counter-drone system.

- This system, developed by EEL, was initiated by the private sector without formal requisitions from the Indian Armed Forces.
- The new micro-missile system, developed for the Indian Army, successfully hit virtual targets over 2.5 km away.
- This system, **developed to counter the rising threat** of loitering munitions and weaponized drones, uses micro-missiles to effectively target and destroy enemy drones at an affordable cost.

About The Bhargavastra system:

The Bhargavastra system, designed for the Indian Army (IA), is a multi-layered defense option that **can detect small flying** objects up to 6 kilometers (km) away.

Key Features:

- i.**It is capable of firing over **64 micro missiles at once**, making it a cost-effective alternative to expensive surface-to-air missiles.
 - ii.**It has been designed to **operate across various terrains**, including high-altitude areas, and can be mounted on a mobile platform for quick deployment.
 - iii.**The system's multi-missile salvo capability offers an edge over global counterparts, effectively countering drone swarms beyond conventional methods like jamming or spoofing.
 - iv.**The system **focuses** on countering drone attacks by utilizing an advanced radar and fire control system to detect and track Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The system is designed to operate at altitudes of up to 5,000 meters.
- The radar in the command control center can detect medium to large drones at a range of 10 km and small drones at 6 km. This advanced radar can also detect targets with low radar cross-section (RCS).

Key Trials:

- i.**On January 12, **the first trial** was conducted against a stationary target located 2,500 meters (m) away and 400 meters in the air.
- ii.**On January 13, **the second trial** was carried out on a moving electronic target. Both tests were held at the Gopalpur Seaward Firing Ranges located in Odisha.
- iii** The system is set to undergo more extensive trials in the coming year, with the potential for induction into the military.

DRDO Successfully Conducts Field Trials of Nag Mark 2 Anti-Tank Guided Missile

On January 13, 2025, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**), under the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and headquartered in New Delhi, Delhi, successfully conducted field trials of the **Nag Mark 2**, an advanced Anti-Tank Fire-and-Forget Guided Missile.

- The trials took place at the **Pokhran Field Range** in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan.
- With the successful trials, the Nag Mark 2 and its carrier system are now ready for induction into the Indian Army (IA), reflecting India's progress under the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) initiative.

About Nag Mark 2:

The Nag Mark 2 is a third-generation anti-tank missile, developed indigenously by DRDO.

Key Features:

i.It incorporates **fire-and-forget technology**, enabling operators to lock onto a target before launch and strike it with high accuracy.

ii.During the three field trials, the **missile successfully destroyed all targets**, demonstrating its effectiveness at both maximum and minimum ranges.

- This showcased its capability to neutralise modern armoured threats, including tanks equipped with explosive reactive armour (ERA).

iii.It travels at 230 metres per second and destroys enemy tanks up to 4 kilometers away within 17-18 seconds.

iv.It weighs approximately 45 kg and measures 6 feet 1 inch.

v.It was developed by DRDO at a cost of ₹300 crore.

Note: The Nag Missile Carrier (**NAMICA**) Version 2, a vehicle-mounted missile carrier, was also tested successfully. This system ensures the effective deployment of the Nag Mark 2 missile on the battlefield.

About Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO):

Chairman– Sameer Venkatapathy Kamat

Established– 1958

Headquarters– New Delhi, Delhi

IMPORTANT DAYS

77th Indian Army Day – 15 January 2025: Commissioning of Three Major Naval Combatants

Indian Army Day is celebrated every year on **15th January** across the globe to honor the courage and dedication of the Indian Army (IA) soldiers.

- It is also known as **Bhartiya Sena Diwas**, the day commemorates the appointment of Field Marshal KM Cariappa as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army in 1949.
- On the occasion of Indian Army Day 2025, Prime Minister (PM) of India Narendra Modi commissioned three significant naval combatants—Indian Naval Ship (**INS**) **Surat**, **INS Nilgiri**, and **INS Vaghsheer**—at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai, Maharashtra.
- The Nepali Army Band participated for the first time in the Parade held in Pune, Maharashtra.
- The Indian Army showcased its Multi-Utility Legged Equipment (MULEs), commonly referred to as robotic dogs.

15th January 2025, marks the observance of the **77th Indian Army Day**.

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- It is also known as **Bhartiya Sena Diwas**, the day commemorates the appointment of Field Marshal KM Cariappa as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army in 1949.

Note: Indian Army was established in 1895, but it was not until 1949 that India had its first Army Chief.

15th January 2025, marks the observance of the **77th Indian Army Day**.

The year 2025 has been declared as the '**Year of Reforms**' for the Ministry of Defence (MoD), focusing on enhancing processes across the ministry and the three armed forces.

PM Modi Commissions INS Surat, INS Nilgiri, and INS Vaghsheer:

On the occasion of Indian Army Day 2025, Prime Minister (PM) of India Narendra Modi commissioned three significant naval combatants—Indian Naval Ship **(INS) Surat, INS Nilgiri, and INS Vaghsheer**—at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai, Maharashtra, built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), located in Mumbai.

- This remarkable event marked the **first-ever tri-commissioning** of a destroyer, frigate, and submarine together.

Key Points:

i.INS Surat, the fourth Visakhapatnam-class destroyer and the final ship of **Project 15B**, is a highly advanced guided missile destroyer with 75% indigenous content and state-of-the-art technology.

ii.INS Nilgiri, the **first ship of Project 17A**, is a next-generation stealth frigate designed by the Indian Navy (IN) with advanced survivability features.

iii INS Vaghsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the **P75 Scorpene Project**, is the sixth submarine of the first batch of six Kalvari-class submarines for the Indian Navy, highlights India's submarine construction expertise in collaboration with France's Naval Group.

2025 Events:

For the first time, the Indian Army Day Parade was held in Pune, Maharashtra, at the BEG & Centre Parade Ground, Khadki.

i. The event **featured** a grand march past by **eight regimental** contingents, a “**Know Your Army Mela**” highlighting technological advancements, and the **participation** of the **Women Agniveer** Contingent, emphasizing inclusivity and empowerment.

ii. The Indian Army (IA) showcased its Multi-Utility Legged Equipment (**MULEs**), commonly referred to as robotic dogs.

- These advanced machines enhance operational capabilities in challenging terrains, reducing risks for soldiers. The Army recently added 100 robotic dogs to its arsenal, marking a step forward in technological innovation.

iii. Participation of the Nepali Army Band:

The Nepali Army Band participated in the parade for the **first time**, symbolizing the strong bonds between the Indian and Nepali armed forces.

- The band, comprising **33 members**, including **three women** soldiers, performed with both a Brass and Pipe Band. Their performance showcased the cultural and musical ties between India and Nepal, highlighting the nations’ commitment to peace and stability.

Point to Note: PM Modi announced the approval and commencement of work on the Vadhavan Port in Maharashtra, with an investment of Rs 75,000 crore.

Key Facts:

i. India has established itself as the **First Responder** in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), reinforcing its leadership in regional security and humanitarian efforts.

ii. Defence production has crossed **Rs 1.25 lakh crore**, with exports to over 100 countries.

iii. Over the last decade, the Indian Navy has inducted **33 ships and 7 submarines, with 39 of 40 vessels** built in Indian shipyards.

iv. India is constructing 60 large ships valued at around Rs 1.5 lakh crore.

STATE NEWS

MP CM Mohan Yadav Launched Swami Vivekanand Yuva Shakti Mission

In January 2025, **Dr. Mohan Yadav**, Chief Minister (CM) of Madhya Pradesh (MP) launched **"Swami Vivekanand Yuva Shakti Mission"** on the occasion of National Youth Day (12th January) which marks the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, at Ravindra Bhavan Auditorium in Bhopal, MP. He also launched the Swami Vivekananda Yuva Shakti Mission Portal and theme song.

- He unveiled the logo of mission which is based on its motto i.e. "Atma Deepo Bhava-Samvad, Samarthyā, Samriddhi".
- He also inaugurated the world's largest 3-D Rangoli depicting Swami Vivekananda at Shaurya Smarak in Bhopal, MP. The 3-D rangoli, a 18,000 square-foot artwork, was made using eco-friendly natural colors. It was created by famous rangoli artist Shikha Sharma Joshi and her team from Indore (MP).

About Swami Vivekanand Yuva Shakti Mission:

i.The key target of the mission is to achieve a **100%** pass rate for students in the board exams of Class 10th and Class 12th by 2030.

ii.The mission has 3 main goals to empower the youth. The 1st one is to ensure the income level of every youth at least meet the rate of a minimum-skilled category worker.

iii.The 2nd goal is to ensure that every youth completes education up to class 12th. The 3rd goal is to encourage youth to participate in various social initiatives for the betterment of society.

18th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh inaugurated 'Entrepreneurship Development Conclave' in Pune, Maharashtra

In January 2025, Union Minister **Rajiv Ranjan Singh** alias Lalan Singh, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying(MoFAHD) and Ministry of Panchayati Raj(MoPR), inaugurated the '**Entrepreneurship Development Conclave**' at G.D. Madulkar Natya Grihain in **Pune**, Maharashtra.

- The event was organized by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (**DAHD**) under the MoFAHD with an aim to bring together key policymakers, industry leaders, and stakeholders from the livestock sector to boost innovation and accelerate growth.
- The **theme** of the event was "Empowering Entrepreneurs: Transforming Livestock Economies".

i. During the event, Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh launched a total of **40 projects**. 20 projects each under the National Livestock Mission (NLM) and the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) with an outlay of **Rs 545.04 crores**.

ii. NLM – Entrepreneurship Development Programme(**NLM-EDP**) **Dashboard** was launched to provide an organized summary of project information to the public.

About Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying (MoFAHD):

Union Minister- Rajiv Ranjan Singh (Constituency – Munger, Bihar)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – Satya Pal Singh Baghel (Constituency – Agra, Uttar Pradesh, UP);

George Kurian(Rajya Sabha – Madhya Pradesh, MP)

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- The **theme** of the event was "Empowering Entrepreneurs: Transforming Livestock Economies".

Key People:

The event was attended by Union Minister of State (MoS) Satya Pal Singh Baghel, MoFAHD and MoPR; Union MoS George Kurian, MoFAHD and Ministry of Minority Affairs(MoMA) along with Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister(CM) Ajit Pawar and Maharashtra's Minister for Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Pankaja Pradnya Munde.

Key Highlights:

i. During the event, Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh launched a total of **40 projects**. 20 projects each under the National Livestock Mission (NLM) and the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) with an outlay of **Rs 545.04 crores**.

- He also launched two compendiums showcasing success stories of AHIDF and NLM beneficiaries.

ii.NLM – Entrepreneurship Development Programme(**NLM-EDP**) **Dashboard** was launched to provide an organized summary of project information to the public.

- The updated **NLM Operational Guidelines 2.0** and a compilation of success stories were also launched.

iii.The top-performing states **Maharashtra, Karnataka**, and Tamil Nadu(**TN**) for **AHIDF**, and **Karnataka, Telangana**, and Madhya Pradesh (**MP**) for the **Entrepreneurship Programme** were awarded during the event.

- Banks such as Canara Bank Limited, State Bank of India(SBI), and HDFC(Housing Development Finance Corporation) Bank Limited were also recognized for their credit support under these schemes.

v. The DAHD declared **14th January to 13th February** as '**Animal Husbandry and Animal Welfare Month**' during which awareness campaigns and educational activities will be held in the country.

vi. The conclave also conducted panel discussions on topics like Catalyzing Growth in Livestock Sector: Entrepreneurship, Processing, and Opportunities and Role of Banks and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Livestock Sector and Credit Facilitation.

About Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF):

AHIDF, launched under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Package in 2020, supports projects in dairy processing, meat processing, feed production, and veterinary infrastructure with an outlay of Rs 17,296 crore.

- As of now, 362 projects worth RS 10,356.90 crore have been approved, with Rs 247.69 crore in interest subventions released.

About National Livestock Mission (NLM):

NLM launched in financial year 2014-15 and it has been realigned during 2021-22 with an outlay of Rs. 2,300 crores.

- The re-aligned NLM is having three Sub-Missions viz. Sub-Mission on Breed improvement of Livestock and Poultry, Sub-Mission of Feed & Fodder and Sub-Mission on Innovation and Extension.

About Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying (MoFAHD):

Union Minister- Rajiv Ranjan Singh (Constituency – Munger, Bihar)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – Satya Pal Singh Baghel (Constituency – Agra, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

MNRE Issued Operational Guidelines for Implementation of Various Components under PMSGMBY

In January 2025, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (**MNRE**) has issued operational guidelines for implementation of various components such as: 'Payment Security Mechanism' component and 'Central Finance Assistance' component for Renewable Energy Service Company (**RESCO**) models/ Utility Led Aggregation (**ULA**) models under the 'Prime Minister-Surya Ghar: Mufti Bijli Yojana (PMSGMBY)'.

- The guidelines provide comprehensive detail about the implementation of two models for the installation of rooftop solar plants for consumers.

Key Points:

i. Under the RESCO model, 3rd -party entities will invest in rooftop solar installations, which will enable consumers to pay only for electricity consumed without bearing any additional costs.

ii. Under the ULA model, Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) or state designated entities will install rooftop solar projects on behalf of individual households.

iii. **Rs 100 crore** corpus fund has been allocated under this scheme component, for the Payment Security Mechanism (PSM) to reduce investment risks in RESCO-based grid-connected rooftop solar models for the residential sector.

- The fund may be supplemented through extra grants and other sources, subject to approval from MNRE.

iv. The guidelines issued by MNRE, are designed to complement the existing capex-based implementation mode available through the national portal

(<https://www.pmsuryaghar.gov.in/>)

- These alternative models aim to boost the adoption of rooftop solar systems while addressing key obstacles to investment and implementation.

About PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana:

i.The Union Cabinet chaired by PM Narendra Modi approved the PMSGMBY on 29th February, 2024.

- The Government of India (GoI) has allocated **Rs 75,021 crore** for the scheme and is to be implemented till Financial Year 2026-27 (FY27).

ii.This scheme is considered as the world's largest domestic rooftop solar programme, which aims to provide free electricity of 300 units per month to 1 crore households in India by March 2027.

iii.The scheme is being implemented by a National programme Implementation Agency (NPIA) at the National level and by the State Implementation Agencies (SIAs) at the state level.

About Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE):

Union Minister- Pralhad Joshi (Constituency- Dharward, Karnataka)

Minister of State (MoS)- Shripad Yesso Naik (Constituency- North Goa)

MoD & BDL Ink Rs. 2,960 crore Contract for MRSAM

On January 16, 2025, the Ministry of Defence (**MoD**) signed a **Rs. 2,960 crore** contract with Hyderabad (Telangana) based Bharat Dynamics Limited (**BDL**) for the supply of Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (**MRSAM**) for the Indian Navy (IN) in New Delhi(Delhi).

- The contract was signed by MoD and BDL officials in the presence of **Rajesh Kumar Singh**, Defence Secretary, MoD.

Key Points:

- i.**The MRSAM system is jointly developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**) and Israel Aerospace Industries (**IAI**), in partnership with Indian industries from both the public and private sectors, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- ii.**It will be installed on various Indian Naval Ships (INS) and integrated into upcoming naval platforms.
- ii.**Under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, BDL will supply the missiles under the 'Buy (Indian)' category with mostly indigenous components.

About Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missiles (MRSAM) :

i.MRSAM, developed jointly with **Israel**, is a high-response, quick-reaction, vertically launched supersonic missile designed to counter enemy aerial threats such as missiles, aircraft, guided bombs, and helicopters.

- It is used by the IN, the Indian Army(IA) and the Indian Air Force(IAF) in different variants.
 - ii.**It is 4,500 millimeters (mm) long, 225 mm in diameter, and weighs 275 kilograms (kg).
 - iii.**It is capable of engaging multiple targets simultaneously at a range of **up to 70 kilometers** (km)
 - iv.**It is powered by an indigenously developed rocket motor and control system, and offers high flexibility in the terminal phase.
 - v.**In December 2020, the DRDO conducted the first successful launch of the MRSAM (Army Version) from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha.
- The IA established its first MRSAM Regiment in the Eastern Sector in 2023.

About Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL):

BDL is a Miniratna I Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSE) under the Ministry of Defence (MoD), Government of India (GoI) that manufactures guided missile systems and allied equipment for the Indian Armed Forces (IAF).

Chairman & Managing Director (**CMD**) – Commodore A Madhavarao (Retd.)

Headquarters – Hyderabad, Telangana

Founded – 1970

GoI Reconstituted AEC with Ajith Kumar Mohanty as Chairman

In January 2025, the Government of India (GoI) has **reconstituted** the high-powered Atomic Energy Commission (**AEC**) to include new members Cabinet Secretary **T.V. Somanathan** and Expenditure Secretary **Manoj Govil** as ex-officio member of AEC.

- The newly reconstituted AEC also included **Pankaj Mishra**, who took over charge of member (Finance) for AEC in 2024

Members of the Reconstituted AEC:

i.The GoI has decided to retain **Ajith Kumar Mohanty**, Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) as the **chairman** of the reconstituted AEC.

ii.AEC has Ajit Kumar Doval, National Security Advisor (NSA)of India; Dr. Pramod Kumar Mishra, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister (PM); Vikram Misri, Foreign Secretary; and Vivek Bhasin, Director, Trombay, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) as ex-officio members.

iii.Other members include: Dr. M.R. Srinivasan, former chairman of AEC; Professor P. Rama Rao, former secretary, Department of Science and Technology (DoS&T), Ministry of Science and Technology (MoS&T); Dr. Anil Kakodkar, Chairman of Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Rajiv Gandhi Science & Technology and former chairman of AEC; Dr. Ravi B. Grover, former Principal Advisor of DAE; Dr. K. Kasturirangan, former chairman of Space Commission.

Note: The appointment of other members of AEC is made for each Calendar Year (CY) on the recommendation of the Chairman, AEC and after approval by the PM of India.

About Atomic Energy Commission (AEC):

It was initially established in August 1948 as part of the Department of Scientific Research. The DAE was constituted on 3rd August, 1954 under the direct charge of PM through Presidential Order. Later, GoI introduced a resolution dated March 01, 1958 and established AEC under the administrative control of DAE.

- AEC is mainly responsible for formulating policies related to atomic energy and ensure their implementation through DAE.

Chairman- Ajith Kumar Mohanty

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

MEITY in association with DSCI Launches CSGC 2.0 for Advancing Cybersecurity Innovations

On January 15, 2025, **S. Krishnan**, Secretary of the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (**MEITY**), introduced the second edition of the Cyber Security Grand Challenge (**CSGC 2.0**). This initiative is implemented by the Data Security Council of India (DSCI) based on Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP) to boost India's cybersecurity capabilities and prepare for a secure digital future

- The total prize money for CSGC 2.0 has been substantially increased to **₹6.85 crores**, compared to ₹3.2 crores in its first edition
- Registration is open from **January 15**, 2025 and will continue until **February 14, 2025**.

I. Participants will develop innovative solutions in **six key areas**: Application Programming Interface (API) Security, Data Security, Wearable Device Security and Privacy, Clone and Fake Application (App)

Mitigation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Threat Detection and Incident Response, and Securing Next-Generation Biometric Systems.

II. The challenge is divided into four stages:

i. Idea Stage: A total of 36 startups (6 per problem area) will be selected, each receiving INR 5 lakh.

ii. Minimum Viable Product (MVP) Stage: 18 startups will be chosen and awarded INR 10 lakh each.

iii. Final Product Stage: Winners for each problem area will receive INR 25 lakh.

iv. Go-to-Market Stage: At this final stage, three top winners will be announced: Platinum Winner receiving Rs 1 crore, Gold Winner receiving Rs 50 lakh, and Silver Winner receiving Rs 25 lakh.

C-DOT Partners with IIT Delhi to Develop THz Communication Front Ends for 6G Technology

In January 2025, The Centre for Development of Telematics (**C-DOT**), a telecom research and development (R&D) center under the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications (MoC) has partnered with the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (**IIT Delhi**) based in New Delhi, Delhi to work on "**Building Blocks for Terahertz (THz) Communication Front Ends**" for 6G (sixth-generation) technology.

- The Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering and Research (**SAMEER**), located at Kolkata, West Bengal will assist IIT Delhi in developing these components at its facilities.

Key People: The agreement was signed in the presence of Dr. Rajkumar Upadhyay, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of C-DOT, Prof. Ananjan Basu, the principal investigator from IIT Delhi, and C-DOT Directors Dr. Pankaj Kumar Dalela and Shikha Srivastava.

i. This collaboration, under the Telecom Technology Development Fund (**TTDF**) 6G Call for Proposal by the Department of Telecommunications, supports the Bharat 6G Vision to develop advanced, secure, and high-quality 6G networks.

ii. The project aims to develop essential devices and components for THz (terahertz) systems, which are critical for the 6G communication network.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

China built World's First 300 MW CAES Plant Connected to Grid at Full Capacity

In January 2025, **Nengchu-1**, the world's first **300-Megawatt** (MW) Compressed Air Energy Storage (CAES) demonstration project was fully connected to the grid in Yingcheng, central China's Hubei Province.

- It is the world's **first** full green, non-supplementary combustion project invested and individually developed by China Energy Engineering Group Corporation Limited(**CEEC**).
- i.**Nengchu-1 is the world's first large-scale CAES solution with independent intellectual property rights and a full industrial supply chain which will store physical energy for a long time.
- ii.**The project has made **three world records** in terms of single-unit power, storage capacity, and energy conversion efficiency.
- The energy storage capacity reaches 1,500 megawatt-hours (MWh), and the underground gas storage reaches 700,000 cubic meters(m³).
 - The long-term energy storage effect is remarkable, with energy storage for 8 hours and energy release for 5 hours per day, and a service life of more than 30 years.
- iii.**It will save 159,000 tons of standard coal and reduce carbon dioxide(CO₂) emissions by 411,000 tons annually thus monitoring the functions of the power grid and variability of renewable energy generation.

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI Decided to Conduct Daily VRR Operations to Boost Banking Liquidity amid Deficit

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) has decided to conduct Variable-Rate Repo (**VRR**) auctions on a daily basis until further notice. This move will boost the banking liquidity amid deficit.

- The 1st such VRR was conducted on January 16, 2025 worth Rs 50,000 crore and standalone primary dealers were allowed to participate in the auction with other eligible bidders.

Key Points:

i.In order to manage liquidity deficit, RBI has decided to reduce the Cash Reserve Ratio (**CRR**) of all banks to **4%** of their deposits in two equal tranches of 25 basis points (bps) each with effect from the fortnight starting December 14, 2024 and December 28, 2024.

Need to Introduce Daily VRR:

i.According to the RBI data, the banking system liquidity deficit was at Rs 2.09 lakh crore as of January 14, 2025.

- VRR auctions allow the RBI to inject liquidity into the banking system, when it turns into deficit mode.

ii.On January 15 2025, RBI conducted a 5-day VRR auction with a notified amount of Rs 75,000 crore, and banks had submitted bids worth Rs 3,980 crore. This is in contrast to its 4-day VRR auction on January 13, 2025 worth Rs 50,000 crore which received total bids worth Rs 86,155 crore.

iii.RBI increasing intervention in foreign exchange has mainly been the reason behind this decrease in overall banking liquidity.

- The Forex Reserve of India has already decreased to 10-month low in January 03, 2025.

Important Terms:

i.VRR: It acts as means to infuse short-term liquidity into the banking system. It is a process through which RBI allows banks to borrow at rate determined by the market generally lower than Repo rate for maximum period of 14 days.

ii.CRR: RBI has mandated to all commercial banks in India to maintain certain percentage of total deposits with it in the form of cash.

RBI Introduces Changes to FEMA to Facilitate Cross-Border Trade in INR

On January 16, 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) introduced **new measures** under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (**FEMA**) 1999, to encourage the use of the Indian Rupee (**INR**) and other local currencies for international trade.

- These changes are the result of a detailed review of FEMA regulations 1999, conducted in collaboration with the Government of India (GoI).

Note: This move comes as the Indian currency faces depreciation.

Key Changes:

i.Overseas branches of Indian banks can now **open INR accounts (A/C)** for individuals or entities outside India. These accounts can be used for permissible current and capital account transactions with Indian residents.

ii.Non-residents are now **allowed** to settle legitimate transactions with other non-residents using balances in their repatriable INR accounts. These accounts include: Special Non-Resident Rupee Accounts (**SNRR**), Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (**SRVA**)

iii.Additionally, **the balances** in these accounts can be used for investments, such as Foreign Direct Investment (**FDI**) in non-debt instruments.

iv.Indian exporters will now have the **flexibility** to open accounts in foreign currencies abroad. These accounts can be used to receive export payments and pay for imports, simplifying trade settlements.

Point to Note: To promote trade in local currencies, the RBI has signed agreements (MoUs) with the central banks of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Indonesia, and the Maldives.

About Special Non-Resident Rupee (SNRR):

SNRR Account is a bank account in India that allows individuals and entities based outside India to hold funds in Indian Rupees.

- Any person or entity residing outside India with **business interests in India can open** this account provided they comply with the rules and regulations of the FEMA Act. The account's duration cannot exceed seven years.

Note: Nationals or entities from Pakistan and Bangladesh need prior approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to open an SNRR account.

About Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA) :

In July 2022, the RBI launched Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (**SRVA**) to boost the use of INR for international trade. This account is held by a domestic bank for a foreign bank in the domestic currency.

- Banks from partner countries need to approach an authorized domestic dealer bank to open an SRVA.

Note: Domestic banks **must ensure** that the correspondent bank is not from a high-risk or non-cooperative country listed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

BoB Launches 'BoB Liquid FD scheme'

In January 2025, Vadodara(Gujarat) based Bank of Baroda(**BoB**) has launched a new Fixed Deposit (FD) scheme named '**bob Liquid FD**' as an alternative to the traditional FD that has combined the benefits of FD interest rates with the convenience of easy liquidity of a Savings Account.

- The depositors can **partially withdraw** money without having to close the entire FD, to meet emergency needs as and when required. The balance funds continue to earn interest at the fixed rate in the same FD.

i.The scheme has flexible deposit amounts starting **at Rs.5,000** (and in multiples of Rs.1,000 thereafter, with no maximum deposit amount), duration of the deposit ranges from **12 to 60 months** and partial withdrawals are accepted in multiples of Rs.1,000.

ii.The bank offers an interest rate between **4.25%** and **7.15%** on regular fixed deposits for general citizens.

- The bank also offers highest interest rate of **7.30%** and additional interest rate for senior citizens for deposits below **Rs. 3 crores**.

iii.Furthermore, **no penalty** is levied for premature withdrawals on FD up to **Rs.5 lakh** with completed duration of at least 12 months.

- If FD is below **Rs.1 crore**, a penalty of **1%** will be imposed from the applicable interest rate for the completed period or the agreed rate, whichever is lower.
- If the FD is of **Rs.1 crore and above**, a penalty of **1.5%** will be imposed from the applicable interest rate for the completed period or the agreed rate.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

India Set to Become World's 4th Largest Economy by 2026; GDP to Grow 6.8% in FY25: PHDCCI

According to New Delhi (Delhi)-based PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (**PHDCCI**)'s latest report titled '**Economic Outlook 2025**', India is set to become the World's **4th largest economy by 2026**, surpassing Japan.

- The report has further projected that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow at **6.8%** in Financial Year 2024-25(FY25) and **7.7%** in FY26.
- This growth projection is mainly driven by strong macroeconomic fundamentals and policy reforms.

Key Findings:

i.The report has also projected India will become **USD 7 trillion** economy by **2030**, which will further increase to USD 10 trillion by 2034 and USD 34 trillion by 2047.

- It has expected India to achieve ambitious target of USD 2 trillion exports by 2030.

ii.Ahead of the Union Budget for FY26, the industry chamber has suggested that peak rate of income tax, which is currently applicable at 30% on income above Rs 15 lakh should be applicable only to individuals having income above Rs 40 lakh.

- It has further suggested reducing the tax rate on proprietorships, partnerships and LLPs from the current 33% to 25%.

iii.As per the report, **Inflation** in India is expected to be around **4.5%** for the current fiscal year (FY25) and around 4% for the next fiscal year(FY26)

- PHDCCI has estimated that Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation should decrease significantly between 4% and 2.5% in the coming quarters.

iv.The Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) at 33.5% of GDP is indicative of steady and sustainable capacity expansion, signalling strong industrial growth in the coming quarters.

v.PHDCCI has outlined 5-pronged strategy which will help in sustaining India's high growth: increased capital expenditure, ease of doing business, reducing the cost of doing business, and improving labour-intensive manufacturing.

About PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI):

It is a non-governmental organization in India dedicated to promoting industry, trade, and entrepreneurship.

President- Hemant Jain

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 1905

FICCI: India estimated to grow by 6.4% & CPI inflation projected at 4.8% in FY25

In January 2025, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (**FICCI**) released its **Economic Outlook Survey**. It projects India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth for 2024-25 is projected at **6.4%** from the **7.0%** estimated in September 2024 reflecting a decline as compared to the 8.2% growth achieved in 2023-24.

- The survey was conducted in December 2024, attributes the economic moderation to global uncertainties and domestic challenges.
- Consumer Price Index (**CPI**)-based inflation has been projected at **4.8%** for 2024-25, aligning with the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast in its December 2024 monetary policy whereas the food inflation is expected to decline.

Key Highlights:

i. According to the FICCI Survey, India's consumer spending, agriculture and rural consumption is expected to recover.

- The **agriculture** sector, including allied activities, is estimated to grow at **3.6%**, while the **industrial** and **services** sectors are expected to rise by **6.3%** and **7.3%** respectively.

ii. The survey reported that the growth will be driven by government-led investments in infrastructure, housing, and logistics.

iii. The growth in private capital expenditure is expected to remain low due to geopolitical uncertainties and uneven domestic demand.

iv. Furthermore, India is expected to benefit from a considerable growth in manufacturing, electronics, and pharmaceuticals sectors.

v. Economic growth will be supported by factors such as softening inflation in advanced economies, easing monetary policies, and recovery in interest-affected sectors.

- However, risks can be faced by challenges like geopolitical tensions, trade uncertainties, and climate-induced disruptions and increased public debt levels.

vi. The survey has estimated the median forecast for **exports** at **USD 450.5 billion** and for **imports** at **USD 729.6 billion** in 2024-25.

About Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI):

President– Harsha Vardhan Agarwal

Headquarters– New Delhi, Delhi

Founded– 1927

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

L&T Launches Second Multi-Purpose Vessel 'INS Utkarsh' for IN

In January, 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra)- based Larsen & Toubro Limited (**L&T**) has launched the Indian Navy (IN)'s **second** Multi-Purpose Vessel (**MPV**), named 'Indian Naval Ship (**INS**) **Utkarsh**', from its shipyard in Kattupalli, near Chennai, Tamil Nadu (TN).

- This launch follows just three months after the launch of the first MPV, INS Samarthak

Key People: The vessel was launched by **Dr. Sushmita Misra Singh**, wife of Union Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Ministry of Defence (MoD). The event was attended by senior Navy officials, including Vice Admiral B. Sivakumar and Rear Admiral Vishal Bishnoi.

About INS Utkarsh:

The INS Utkarsh was designed at L&T's Warship Design Centre in Chennai and constructed at the L&T Shipbuilding Limited in Kattupalli.

Key Features:

- i. The MPV is 107 meters (m) long, 18.6 m wide, weighs over 3,750 tonnes (t) and reaches speeds of up to 50 knots.
- ii. It is designed to perform various tasks, including maritime surveillance, humanitarian assistance and pollution control.
- iii. It also serves as a platform for testing indigenous weapons and sensors, promoting self-reliance in defense technology. Additionally, the vessel aids in the navigation of ships, further enhancing its versatility.

Note: In addition to these MPVs, L&T is building three Cadet Training Ships and six other defence vessels for the IN under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

About Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Limited :

Chairman and Managing Director (**CMD**)– Sekharipuram Narayanan (SN) Subrahmanyam

Headquarters– Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established– 1946

Google-Backed Pixxel Launches First Three Satellites of Firefly Constellation

Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based **Pixxel**, a space technology startup backed by Google, has successfully launched the **first three satellites** of its **Firefly constellation**, marking **India's first** private satellite constellation.

- This launch is the first phase of Pixxel's commercial satellite constellation, with three more Firefly satellites set to launch in the second quarter (Q2) of 2025.

About Firefly constellation:

The Firefly constellation consists of some of the highest-resolution commercial-grade hyperspectral satellites, launched aboard **SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission** from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California, United States of America (USA).

- The Firefly constellation's cutting-edge technology sets a new standard in hyperspectral imaging, with a resolution that is six times sharper than existing satellites.

Note:The Fireflies are now the **world's highest-resolution** commercial-grade hyperspectral satellites

Key Features of the Satellites:

i.The satellites, **integrated by Exolaunch**, boast a resolution of 5 meters (m)—much sharper than the 30-meter resolution typical of most hyperspectral satellites—offering exceptional clarity for Earth observation.

ii.These advanced satellites are designed to capture **data across** more than **150 spectral bands**, allowing them to detect even the smallest changes in chemical compositions, vegetation health, water quality, and atmospheric conditions.

iii. This **high level of precision** makes them invaluable for applications in agriculture, climate monitoring, resource management, and environmental protection.

iv.They **orbit** at approximately 550 kilometers (kms) in a sun-synchronous orbit, serving as a key part of Pixxel's mission to create a global "health monitor" for the planet.

v.With a **swathe width of 40 kms** and the ability to revisit areas daily, the satellites can monitor large areas continuously, ensuring important events are not missed.

Related News: **Digantara**, an aerospace company based in Bengaluru, Karnataka and backed by Aditya Birla Group, has successfully launched its Space Camera for Object Tracking **(SCOT)** mission.

- The mission is designed for **space surveillance**, enabling the detection and tracking of objects as small as 5 centimeters(cm). This launch was also a part of SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission.

About Pixxel:

Founder and Chief Executive Officer **(CEO)**– Awais Ahmed

Headquarters– Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established– 2019

IMPORTANT DAYS

9th Indian Armed Forces Veterans' Day – January 14

Armed Forces Veterans' Day is annually celebrated across India on **14 January** to honour and recognise the service of **Field Marshal Kodandera Madappa Cariappa**, the 1st Indian Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the Indian Armed Forces, who retired on this day in 1953 and led Indian forces to victory in the 1947 war.

- **14 January 2025** marks the 9th Armed Forces Veterans' Day observance.

i.The Armed Forces Veterans' Day was first celebrated in 2017.

ii.The day is observed with programs at major military stations and cities, featuring ceremonial parades and gatherings of veterans, Veer Naris(the widows of our soldiers), and their families.

About Ministry of Defence(MoD):

Union Minister – Rajnath Singh (Constituency – Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Minister of State (MoS) – Sanjay Seth(Constituency- Ranchi, Jharkhand).

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Background:

i.The Armed Forces Veterans' Day was first celebrated in 2017.

ii.Since then the day has been commemorated by all the 3 services by hosting interactive events in honour of the Ex-Servicemen, who have selflessly served the nation.

About KM Cariappa:

i. KM Cariappa joined the British Indian Army in 1919 after the end of World War I and was commissioned as a temporary first lieutenant into the 2/88 Carnatic Infantry.

ii. Field Marshal KM Cariappa led Indian forces on the Western Front during the 1947 Indo-Pakistani War.

iii. He was appointed C-in-C of the Indian Army in 1949 and was one of only 2 Indian Army officers to hold the 5-star rank of Field Marshal.

- The other officer was Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw.

2025 Events:

9th Armed Forces Veterans' Day is observed with programs at major military stations and cities, featuring ceremonial parades and gatherings of veterans, Veer Naris (the widows of our soldiers), and their families. Organizations such as the Army Welfare Placement Organization and the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV) are dedicated to supporting and providing opportunities for these courageous women.

i. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Ministry of Defence (MoD) highlighted **2025 as the diamond jubilee year of the 1965 Indo-Pak war**, crediting India's victory to the courage and sacrifice of the Armed Forces.

- He referred to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) as an integral and cherished part of India, calling it the nation's "**crown jewel.**"

i. Rajnath Singh hoisted a 108-foot National Flag and inaugurated the '**Akhnoor Heritage Museum,**' in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), celebrating the region's rich history and culture.

Notable Schemes Supporting Defence Pensioners & Veterans –

- On November 7, 2015, One Rank One Pension (OROP) was implemented as a tribute to the courage and sacrifices of veterans and ex-service personnel.
- Project **NAMAN** (National Assistance for Military and Armed Forces Veterans) aims to support Defence Pensioners, Veterans, and their families. It focuses on the implementation of the System for Pension Administration Raksha (**SPARSH**), a digital pension system that streamlines pension processes and ensures accessible facilitation points for Veterans and Next of Kin (**NOK**) across India.

About Ministry of Defence(MoD):

Union Minister – Rajnath Singh (Constituency – Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – Sanjay Seth (Constituency- Ranchi, Jharkhand).

19th & 20th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Cabinet approvals on January 16th 2025

On January 16 2025, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister (PM) **Narendra Modi** has approved the following proposals:

- i.**Construction of a Third Launch Pad (**TLP**) for Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO's) Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) at Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh (AP).
- ii.**Formation of the **8th Pay** Commission to revise salaries of central government employees and pensioners.
- iii.**Refarming of 687 megahertz (MHz) of spectrum from government ministries and ISRO to support 5th Generation (5G) and future 6th Generation (6G) services.
- iv.**Revival plan for Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) at a total cost of Rs 11,440 crores.
- v.**Creation of 2 new Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) reserve Battalions.

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- iv.**Revival plan for Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) at a total cost of Rs 11,440 crores.
- v.**Creation of 2 new Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) reserve Battalions.

Cabinet approves construction of TLP for ISRO

i.The Union Cabinet has approved the construction of a TLP at the ISRO's SDSC in Sriharikota to enhance its space infrastructure and support the development of Next Generation Launch Vehicles (NGLV).

- The project costs **Rs. 3,984.86 crore** and is expected to be completed in 4 years.

ii.The TLP will be versatile, supporting both NGLV and Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM3) vehicles, including advanced features like horizontal rocket integration.

iii.This new pad will boost India's space capabilities, enabling the launch of heavier spacecraft, with the ability to carry 30,000 tonnes (t) into low Earth orbit, compared to the current 8,000 t.

iv.The project aligns with India's growing space ambitions, including upcoming missions like the 'Bharatiya Antariksh Station(BAS)' and crewed lunar missions.

Note: Indian Space Transportation Systems are completely reliant on two launch pads viz. First Launch Pad (FLP) & Second Launch Pad (SLP)

Cabinet approves formation of the 8th Pay Commission :

i.The Union Cabinet approved the formation of the 8th Pay Commission to revise the salary and pension of over 1.2 crore central government employees and pensioners. The term of the 7th Pay Commission will conclude on December 31 2025, after which the 8th Pay Commission will come into effect.

- This will increase the minimum basic salary of central government employees from Rs 18,000 to over Rs 40,000 per month.

ii.The salary hike, expected to be between 25% and 30%, will also include allowances, perks, and performance pay.

- Approximately 50 lakh central government employees and 65 lakh pensioners will benefit, including defence personnel and government employees in New Delhi (Delhi).

iii.The fitment factor is estimated to range between 2.6% and 2.85%, compared to 2.57% under the **7th Pay** Commission.

About Pay Commissions:

- Pay Commissions are typically formed once every 10 years to advise the government on revising the pay structure and scale for its employees.
- Since 1947, a total of 7 Pay Commissions have been constituted, with the most recent one being implemented in 2016.
- The 7th Pay Commission was formed by the UPA government on 28 February 2014. It was chaired by Justice Ashok Kumar Mathur.

Cabinet approves refarming of 687 MHz spectrum for 5G, 6G :

i.The Union Cabinet has approved the refarming of **687 megahertz**(MHz) of spectrum from government ministries and ISRO to support 5G and future 6G services.

- This spectrum, valued at **Rs. 2 lakh crore**, will be auctioned to telecom operators.
- Of the 687 MHz, 328 MHz will be released immediately, with the remaining portion becoming available in phases by 2030.

ii.The refarming aims to address the rising demand for telecommunication spectrum, projected to reach **2000 MHz** by 2030.

iii.This initiative increases the total available spectrum from 900 MHz to 1,587 MHz, narrowing the gap to 413 MHz.

iv.The refarming reallocates spectrum from key government departments, including Ministry of Defence(MoD), ISRO, and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoI&B), to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communication(MoC) .

CCEA Approves revival plan for RINL :

i.The Union Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (**CCEA**) has approved a revival plan for Visakhapatnam(Andhra Pradesh, AP) based Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL),with a total investment of Rs.11,440 crores.

- This plan includes an equity infusion of Rs.10,300 crores into RINL and the conversion of Rs.1,140 crores of working capital loans into 7% Non-cumulative Preference Share Capital, redeemable after 10 years.

ii.RINL is a Public Sector Enterprise under the Ministry of Steel(MoS), fully owned by the Government of India(GoI), and operates the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (**VSP**) in AP.

- The plant has an installed capacity of **7.3 million** tonnes per annum (Mtpa) of liquid steel.

iii.The goal is for the plant to reach full production capacity, that includes starting full production with 2 blast furnaces in January 2025 and 3 blast furnaces by August 2025.

iv.This strategic move aligns with the 'National Steel Policy of 2017', and ensuring India's self-reliance in the steel sector as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

MHA approves Creation of 2 new CISF reserve Battalions

i.The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has approved the creation of **two new battalions** for the CISF to enhance its capacity and manage increasing security demands.

- The two newly sanctioned battalions will consist of 1,025 personnel, bringing the total number of CISF battalions from **13 to 15** and creating **2,050 new posts**.

ii.With this expansion, the CISF's total strength will rise to nearly 2 lakh personnel.

Note: The CISF is one of India's Central Armed Police Forces(CAPF), established under the CISF Act, of 1968.

DPIIT Partners with ITC to Bolster India's Startup Ecosystem

In January 2025, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (**DPIIT**), Ministry of Commerce & Industry(MoC&I), entered into a strategic partnership with Kolkata(West Bengal) based **ITC Limited** to improve **innovation** and strengthen India's **startup** ecosystem.

- The partnership aims to capitalize on ITC's market network and DPIIT's support initiatives to enhance technological progress and create market opportunities for startups nationwide.

i.Under this partnership, ITC aims to implement startup solutions in strategic areas such as energy storage systems, integrating Renewable Energy(RE) sources for manufacturing locations and digital platforms for Manufacturing Execution Systems (MES).

ii.This collaboration focuses on digital to improve manufacturing's operational excellence and readiness for the future, as well as on renewable energy to strengthen ITCs' sustainability.

C-DOT & IIT Bombay Signed Agreement to Develop Optical Transceiver Chipset for High-Bandwidth 6G Wireless Links

In January 2025, the Centre for Development of Telematics (**C-DOT**), under the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications (MoC) signed an agreement with the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (**IIT B**), Mumbai(Maharashtra) to develop an **“Optical Transceiver Chipset for High-Bandwidth 6G Wireless Links.”**

- The agreement was signed in the presence of Dr. Rajkumar Upadhyay, Chief executive Officer (CEO) of C-DOT, Professor Shalabh Gupta, Principal Investigator from IIT Bombay, and C-DOT Directors Dr. Pankaj Kumar Dalela and Shikha Srivastava.

i.The collaboration is under the Telecom Technology Development Fund (**TTDF**) 6G Call for Proposal initiative.

ii.It aims to accelerate research on the 6G

ecosystem to position India as a global leader in the design, development, and deployment of 6G technology by 2030.

iii.The initiative focuses on affordability, sustainability, and ubiquity, ensuring that cutting-edge communication solutions are accessible to all.

India's 6th Astronomical Observatory & Eastern India's 1st Inaugurated in WB

In January 2025, the Satyendra Nath Bose Centre for Basic Sciences (**SNBCBS**), an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), under the Ministry of Science and Technology (**MoS&T**), established **India's sixth** and **Eastern India's first** astronomical observatory in the Garpanchkot Hills of Purulia district in West Bengal (**WB**).

- The observatory center has been named after the renowned scientist Satyendra Nath Bose.
- The other 5 centers are located in Ladakh, Nainital (Uttarakhand), Mount Abu (Rajasthan), Girawali Hills (Pune, Maharashtra) and Kavalur (Tamil Nadu, TN)

Key People: **Vishvajit Sahay**, Additional Secretary of the Union Science and Technology Department, and other dignitaries were present at the inauguration event.

i.The observatory is equipped with two telescopes, and its seeing value of 1.3 arc seconds matches the standards of the other five astronomical centers across the country.

- It currently has a 14-inch diameter telescope, with a 1-meter diameter telescope set to be installed soon.

ii.It is located 600 meters (m) above sea level in a pollution-free area, with the best observation period being from November to April.

iii.An automatic weather forecasting center has been set up on the hilltop to measure rainfall, temperature, and wind speed.

iv.SNBCBS has partnered with Sidhu Kanu Birsa University in WB for the observatory's operations and resource sharing.

Govt Launches Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan App to Promote Battlefield Tourism

Union Minister **Rajnath Singh**, Ministry of Defence(MoD) launched "**Bharat Ranbhoomi Darshan**" mobile application (**app**) and website to enable civilians to visit and explore significant battlefields along India's borders. The app was launched on 15 January 2025, coinciding with Army Day.

- This app was developed by the MoD, Ministry of Tourism(MoT), and the Indian Army(IA).

i.The app offers a comprehensive guide to tourists, which includes historical insights, battle accounts, stories of bravery, travel information, and applications for permission to enter restricted places.

ii.It includes detailed information of **77** battlefield sites and provides visitors an in-depth overview of some of the major military events.

iii.As part of their tour schedule, tourists can visit important locations like **Siachen**, the world's highest battlefield, and **Galwan**, the site of the 2020 conflict between Indian and Chinese forces.

iv.Users can explore sites like the Dras War Memorial (Kargil War, 1999) in Ladakh, Walong War Memorial (Battle of Walong, 1962) in Arunachal Pradesh(AR), Tawang War Memorial in AR, Longewala War Memorial in Rajasthan, Operation Meghdoot War Memorial in Ladakh, Kibithoo and Bum-La in Arunachal Pradesh (AP), Rezang-La, and Pangong Tso in Ladakh and Cho-La conflict site in Sikkim, using the app's virtual tours and interactive multimedia features.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

WEF Includes CEAT and HUL in the Global Lighthouse Network

In January 2025, Switzerland based World Economic Forum (**WEF**) announced that Sriperumbudur(Tamil Nadu, TN) based **CEAT Limited** and Tinsukia(Assam) based facility of Hindustan Unilever Limited (**HUL**), the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) Company have joined its Global Lighthouse Network (**GLN**) for driving manufacturing transformation through innovation.

- Other 15 new members include companies from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Germany, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), and Morocco (Home to the first Lighthouse site in Africa).

Note: As of January 2025, a total of **16 Indian companies** joined WEF's GLN, with Bharuch (Gujarat) based Jubilant Ingrevia which became a member in October 2024.

Key points:

i.The WEF announced that 17 innovative industrial sites have joined the GLN, bringing the total to 189 facilities, 25 of which are Sustainability Lighthouses that use advanced Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR/Industry 4.0) technologies in manufacturing.

- 13 sites have been named 4IR Lighthouses for driving significant performance improvements through technology-driven transformation.
- 5 sites have been named Sustainability Lighthouses ((one of which was already a Factory Lighthouse) for using advanced solutions to lower their environmental impact.

ii.The latest cohort of Lighthouses has seen an average 53% increase in labor productivity and a 26% reduction in conversion costs, driven by digital solutions like Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Advanced Analytics (AA), and more.

About Global Lighthouse Network (GLN):

i.GLN is an initiative by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and co-founded with McKinsey & Company. Launched in 2018.

ii.The network aims to enhance the performance of manufacturing and supply chains by adopting 4IR technologies.

iii.It helps shape the future by using digital and analytics tools across the value chain to boost growth, productivity, resilience, and environmental sustainability.

iv.It recognizes and awards the world's most advanced operational sites.

About CEAT Limited:

Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer(**MD & CEO**)– Arnab Banerjee

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Founded – 1924

About Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL):

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Rohit Jawa

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Founded – 1933

Indian Navy Participates in 5th Edition of La Perouse 25 Multinational Naval Exercise

On January 16, 2025, the Indian Navy (**IN**), along with eight Indo-Pacific nations, participated in the **5th edition of the La Perouse 25** multinational naval exercise.

- The exercise is being conducted in the strategic maritime straits of **Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok**, which serve as crucial routes for global maritime trade.
- This eight-day exercise, organized by the French Carrier Strike Group (CSG), began on **January 16, 2025, and will continue until January 24, 2025.**

About the exercise La Perouse 25:

The exercise aims to prepare navies for real-world challenges, enhancing their collective response capabilities.

Participants:

i.The exercise involves naval forces from nine nations: **India, Australia, Canada**, the United States of America (**USA**), **France, Indonesia, Malaysia**, the United Kingdom (**UK**), and **Singapore**.

ii.The Indian Navy participated with its destroyer Indian Naval Ship (INS) Mumbai while other nations have deployed various advanced vessels, including:

Key Points:

i.A highlight of the exercise is the use **IORIS** (Indian Ocean Regional Information Sharing) system.

ii.During the exercise, all **navies trained in the use of IORIS**, a system designed for communication and coordination, enabling the effective exchange of information and documents to collectively manage maritime crises.

iii.The exercise **focused** on enhancing interoperability through training in ship inspections for illicit activities while emphasizing the protection of key trade routes from accidents, illegal activities, and natural disasters.

Note: The **4th edition** of the La Perouse exercise was held in 2023 and involved seven nations, taking place in the Bay of Bengal.

BANKING & FINANCE

PFC Sign 120 Billion JPY Loan Deal with JBIC for RE Projects in India

In January 2025, New Delhi (Delhi) based Power Finance Corporation Limited (**PFC**) under the Ministry of Power (MoP) signed an agreement with Tokyo (Japan) based Japan Bank for International Cooperation (**JBIC**) for **120 billion** Japanese Yen (**JPY**) or **Rs.6600 crore** loan to support Renewable Energy(RE) projects in India.

- Under the agreement, JBIC will contribute **JPY 72 billion**(Rs 40.04 billion), while the remaining amount will be provided by commercial banks.
- The initiative supports India's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions and transitioning to cleaner energy sources.

Key People: The loan agreement was signed by **Parminder Chopra**, Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) of PFC and **Ogawa Kazunori**, Senior MD of JBIC in Japan.

Key Points:

i.The long-term loan, with a tenure of **up to 20 years**, will be granted to PFC as part of JBIC's 'Global Action for Reconciling Economic Growth and Environmental Preservation' (**GREEN**) initiative.

- This agreement represents JBIC's largest green financing deal with any Indian company.

ii.PFC will utilize the funds for energy projects in India, including RE, next-generation energy supply, and energy-efficient power generation and heat supply.

iii.It supports India's goal of achieving 50% cumulative electric power generation from non-fossil-fuel-based energy sources by 2030.

Note: In August 2024, PFC received a 25.5 billion yen (Around Rs. 147 crore) loan from JBIC to fund for wind energy project in Karnataka.

About Power Finance Corporation (PFC):

PFC, a **Maharatna** public sector company and one of India's top non-banking financial companies (NBFC), operates under the Ministry of Power (**MoP**), Government of India (GoI).
Chairman & Managing Director (**CMD**) – Parminder Chopra

Headquarter – New Delhi, Delhi

Founded – 1986

About Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC):

President & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Tadashi Maeda

Headquarters – Tokyo, Japan

Founded – 1999

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Indian Economy Expected to Grow by 6.7% in Next Two Fiscal Year: World Bank

In January 2025, **The World Bank(WB)** released its biannual report titled **Global Economic Prospects (GEP) for January 2025**. The report has projected that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow at a rate of **6.7%** over the next two financial years i.e. for Financial Year 2025-26 (FY26) and FY27.

- The projection for FY26 remained same from its GEP for June 2024 and growth rate for FY27 was revised downwards by 10 basis point (bps), from its previous estimate of **6.8%**.

i.The report has estimated India's GDP growth rate for current financial year (FY25) at **6.5%**, down from the 8.2% in FY24

ii.The report has estimated that global growth will remain stable at **2.7%** in both **2025** and **2026**. This projection is based on the gradual decline in inflation and interest rates.

About World Bank (WB):

President– Ajay Banga

Headquarters– Washington, DC, the United States of America (USA)

Established– 1944

IREDA Partners with SJVN, GMR and NEA for 900 MW Upper Karnali Hydropower Project in Nepal

On 17th January 2025, New Delhi(Delhi) based Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (**IREDA**) entered into a Joint Venture (**JV**) Agreement with Shimla, Himachal Pradesh(HP) based **SJVN Limited**(formerly known as Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam), **GMR Energy Limited**, and Nepal Electricity Authority (**NEA**) for the development of the 900 megawatt (MW) Upper Karnali Hydro-electric Project over River Karnali, the largest hydro-electric power project in Nepal.

- The agreement was signed in the presence of senior officials from IREDA, SJVN, and GMR Energy Limited in New Delhi, Delhi.
- The project is partly funded by the Asian Development Bank(ADB), and is expected to be completed within five years of commencement of construction.

Key Points:

i.The joint venture agreement provides a thorough framework for the planning, building, operation, and maintenance of the project using a Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (**BOOT**) model.

- The **USD1.5 billion project** will be in operation for 25 years from its Commercial Operation Date (CoD).

ii.Nepal, will be utilising only 108 Megawatt(MW) of the total power generated for domestic consumption, leaving 792 MW of power for export to countries like India and Bangladesh.

iii.This strategic initiative aims to promote renewable energy sources and enhance regional energy security.

iv.This project will be an example of cross-border cooperation by utilizing the enormous potential of hydropower, providing both environmental and economic advantages.

v.IREDA will invest Rs174.22 crore to acquire a 5% stake with SJVN also investing a similar amount to acquire up to 10% joint stake in GMR Upper Karnali Hydro Power Ltd and Karnali Transmission Co Pvt Ltd, both of which are being executed by GMR Nepal, in association with SJVN.

About Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited (IREDA) :

Chairman & Managing Director(CMD) – Pradip Kumar Das

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Founded – 1987

BPCL Signs Loan Agreement with SBI – led Consortium for Expansion Projects

On January 2025, Mumbai, Maharashtra based Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (**BPCL**), India's 2nd-largest oil marketing company has signed a loan agreement worth **Rs 31,802 crore** with a consortium of banks led by State Bank of India (SBI).

- It aims to finance the expansion of its refinery to 11 Million tonnes per annum (MMTPA) from 7.8 MMTPA and setting up of a petrochemical complex in Bina, Madhya Pradesh (MP).

i. Other consortium members include Punjab National Bank (PNB), Union Bank of India (UBI), Canara Bank (CNB), Bank of India (BOI), and Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM).

ii. BPCL Said that it will construct petrochemicals complex that produces Downstream polymers and Chemicals such as Linear Low Density Polyethylene (LLDPE), High Density Polyethylene (HDPE), Polypropylene (PP), benzene, toluene, and mixed xylene.

Uttarakhand Signs MoU with Iceland's Verkis for Geothermal Energy Development

The Government of **Uttarakhand** has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with Icelandic company Verkis Consulting Engineers (**Verkis**) for geothermal exploration and development in Uttarakhand.

- The agreement was signed in the virtual presence of Chief Minister (CM) **Pushkar Singh Dhami** and Icelandic Ambassador **Dr Benedict Hoskulsson**.

i. The MoU aims to evaluate and promote geothermal energy across identified sites in Uttarakhand.

ii. Under the agreement, feasibility studies for these projects will be funded by the Government of Iceland.

iii. The initiative has the necessary approvals from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC); the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE); and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Note: Kolkata (West Bengal, WB) based Geological Survey of India (**GSI**) and Dehradun (Uttarakhand) based Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (**WIHG**) have identified **40** geothermal hotspots in the state.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Nawaf Abdallah Salim Salam appointed as 53rd PM of Lebanon

In January 2025, **Nawaf Abdallah Salim Salam** was appointed as the 53rd Prime Minister (PM) of Lebanon. He was selected by the parliament by securing **78 votes** out of 128 Members of the Parliament (MPs) and will replace incumbent PM **Najib Azmi Mikati**.

- Currently, he is serving as the President at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), The Hague, Netherlands.

About Nawaf Abdallah Salim Salam:

- Nawaf Abdallah Salim Salam is a Lebanese politician, diplomat, jurist, and academic who had a distinguished career in international law and diplomacy.
 - He began his legal career in 1984 as an appellate lawyer. He served as an advisor and representative for numerous local and international organizations between 1984 to 1989 and 1992 to 2007
 - He is known for voting to condemn Israel 210 times when he was Lebanon's ambassador to the UN. He also voted against United Nations (UN) resolutions condemning crimes committed by Iran, Lebanon, Cuba and Syria.
 - He held positions as Lebanon's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UNs) in New York, the United States of America (USA) from 2007 to 2017.
 - He served as a judge at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) from 2009 to 2018.
- He also served as the President of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and Vice President (VP) of the 67th UN General Assembly (UNGA).
- In February 2024, he was elected as the **27th President** of the ICJ, becoming the 2nd Arab and 1st Lebanese to hold the esteemed position.

About Lebanon:

President– Joseph Khalil Aoun

Capital– Beirut

Currency– Lebanese Pound (LBP)

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin Launched 'New Glenn Rocket' on First Test Flight

In January 2025, **Blue Origin Enterprises, L.P.**, the American space technology company headquartered in Washington, the United States of America (USA), founded by Amazon's Executive Chairman **Jeff Bezos**, successfully launched its reusable '**New Glenn(NG) rocket**' on a first test flight, from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida, the USA. The rocket was named after John Glenn who was the first American to orbit Earth.

- The mission named **NG-1**, included a first-stage booster landing in the Atlantic Ocean, while the rocket's second stage continues towards orbit
- The 320-foot (98-meter(m)) rocket sent a prototype satellite into orbit, designed to deploy satellites into their correct orbits.

About New Glenn Rocket:

i.The mission aimed to demonstrate the rocket's capabilities by placing the Blue Ring Pathfinder test satellite into orbit and landing the rocket's booster onto a drone ship in the Atlantic Ocean.

- The rocket is built to haul spacecraft and eventually astronauts to orbit and also the Moon.

ii.The first-stage booster couldn't land on a barge in the Atlantic, but the company emphasized that the main mission was successful.

iii.For this test, the satellite was planned to stay inside the second stage while orbiting Earth. The mission was expected to last six hours, after which the second stage would be placed in a safe orbit to avoid creating space debris, following NASA's guidelines.

iv.New Glenn is one of several large rockets launched in recent years, joining United Launch Alliance's Vulcan, Europe's updated Ariane 6, and NASA's Space Launch System (SLS), which replaced the Saturn V for moon missions.

Note: SpaceX's Starship, founded by Elon Musk, is the largest rocket ever built, standing about 400 feet (123 meters) tall.

About Blue Origin Enterprises, L.P.:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Dave Limp

Headquarters – Washington, the United States of America (USA)

Founded – 2000

SpaceX Falcon 9 Launches Blue Ghost and Resilience Lunar Landers from Kennedy Space Center

On January 15, 2025, a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launched from Kennedy Space Center, Florida, United States of America (USA) carrying two lunar landers: **Blue Ghost** as the primary payload and **Resilience** as the secondary payload.

- The Blue Ghost , named Ghost Riders in the Sky, is led by **Firefly Aerospace**, headquartered in Texas, USA and the Resilience lunar lander, is spearheaded by Tokyo (Japan)-based **ispace Inc.**
- The two landers have different timelines for reaching the Moon, with Blue Ghost being deployed first.

About Blue Ghost Mission:

Blue Ghost is expected to take **about 45 days** to reach the Moon, gradually increasing its orbit around Earth before entering lunar orbit and landing near Mons Latreille, a volcanic feature in Mare Crisium, located on the Moon's northeast side.

Note:Blue Ghost's mission, targeting a landing on **March 2, 2025**, will span 60 days, including approximately 45 days in orbit and 14 days of operations on the lunar surface.

Key payloads onboard include:

- **LuGRE** (Lunar Global Navigation Satellite System,(GNSS) Receiver Experiment): Monitoring GPS signals to extend navigation capabilities to the Moon.
- **RadPC:** Demonstrating radiation-tolerant computing during transit.

About Resilience Mission:

The Resilience mission focuses on deploying innovative technologies and cultural payloads. Resilience — also known as the Hakuto-R Mission 2 lander. It will land in Mare Frigoris, carrying:

About Firefly Aerospace:

Chief Operating Officer (**CEO**)-Jason Kim

Headquarters- Texas, United States of America (USA)

Established- 2014

About ispace Inc:

Founder and Chief Operating Officer (**CEO**)- Takeshi Hakamada

Established- 2010

Headquarters- Tokyo, Japan

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- **LuGRE** (Lunar Global Navigation Satellite System,(GNSS) Receiver Experiment): Monitoring GPS signals to extend navigation capabilities to the Moon.
- **RadPC**: Demonstrating radiation-tolerant computing during transit.

Key Operations:

i.After landing in Mare Crisium, Blue Ghost will run 10 NASA payloads over a full lunar day (14 Earth days), performing subsurface drilling, sample collection, X-ray imaging, and dust studies.

ii.It will also capture a total lunar eclipse and observe regolith reactions at sunset, with brief operations continuing into the lunar night.

About Resilience Mission:

The Resilience mission focuses on deploying innovative technologies and cultural payloads. Resilience — also known as the Hakuto-R Mission 2 lander. It will land in Mare Frigoris, carrying:

- **Tenacious Micro Rover:** Built by ispace-Europe, this rover will collect lunar regolith, capture high-definition images, and transmit data to the lander.
- Water Electrolyzer and Food Production Equipment, Deep Space Radiation Probe
- **Moonhouse:** A symbolic model house designed by Swedish artist Mikael Genberg.
- **UNESCO** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) **Memory Disk:** Preserving linguistic and cultural heritage.

Resilience will take about **four to five months** to reach the Moon's Mare Frigoris in the far north.

Points to Note:

i. Both missions are pivotal efforts to advance lunar exploration under National Aeronautics and Space Administration (**NASA**)'s **Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative**.

ii. These efforts are key milestones in NASA's goal to develop a lunar economy and support future human exploration under the **Artemis program**.

iii. Both landers face significant challenges in achieving a successful soft landing on the Moon. They must navigate rocky terrain and craters while relying on thrusters for a controlled descent since there is no atmosphere to use parachutes

About Firefly Aerospace:

Chief Operating Officer (**CEO**)- Jason Kim

Headquarters- Texas, United States of America (USA)

Established- 2014

About ispace Inc:

Founder and Chief Operating Officer (**CEO**)- Takeshi Hakamada

Established- 2010

Headquarters- Tokyo, Japan

China Launches PRSC-EO1 Satellite for Pakistan's Space Program

On January 17 2025, China successfully launched Pakistan's first Remote Sensing Satellite - Earth Observing 1 (**PRSC-EO1**) aboard the Long March-Dimensional (LM-2D) rocket for Pakistan from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center (**JSLC**), China. The rocket also carried 2 other satellites, Tianlu-1 and Lantan-1.

- The satellite was designed and developed by Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (**SUPARCO**).
- The PRSC-EO1 launch marked the **95th flight** of the Long March-2D and the **556th flight** of the entire Long March fleet. The launch was China's third orbital launch attempt of the year.

Key Points:

i. PRSC-EO1 satellite was equipped with a high-resolution electro-optical sensor.

- It is the first of a series of three optical remote sensing satellites for Pakistan, which will join Pakistan's existing remote sensing satellites, PRSS-1 and PakTES-1A, in orbit.

ii. The satellite's data will be used for various purposes including land mapping, agricultural classification and assessment, urban and rural planning, environmental monitoring, natural disaster monitoring and management, surveying, natural resource protection, and others.

iii. The mission also launched Decentralized autonomous organization (**DAO-1 or Tianlu-1**), developed by Galaxy Space (Anhui) for Jianghuai Frontier Innovation Technology Center, China and **Blue Carbon-1** (Lantan-1), developed by Geespace, also known as Zhejiang Geespace Technology Co Limited (China) for Hangzhou Dianzi University (China).

iv. The LM-2D is a two-stage liquid propellant launch vehicle designed and developed by the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology (SAST), a subsidiary of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC).

- It is primarily used to launch small to medium-sized satellites into Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and Sun-Synchronous Orbit (SSO), with a payload capacity ranging from 1,300 kilogram (kg) to 700 kilometer (km) SSO.

Note: In 2018, China sent 2 Pakistan satellites into orbit. The PRSS-1, Pakistan's first optical remote sensing satellite, and the PakTES-1A, a smaller observation craft.

About China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC):

Chairman- Chen Mingbo

Headquarters- Beijing, China

Established- 1999

21st JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Startup India Marks 9 Years: 1.59 Lakh Startups Recognised and 16.6 Lakh Jobs Created

On January 16 2025, **Startup India**, a transformative initiative of Government of India (GoI) that started in 2016, has successfully completed **9 years**. The initiative aimed to foster innovation and boost the growth of startups across the country. GoI has designated January 16 as **National Startup Day** to celebrate the nation's stride in promoting a robust and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- With **over 1.59 lakh** startups (from 500 in 2016) recognised by DPIIT (as of January 15, 2025,), India has firmly positioned itself as the world's **3rd** largest startup ecosystem.
- Startup India initiative is being implemented by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry (**MoC&I**).

i. Union Minister Piyush Goyal, MoC&I launched two key initiatives including the **PRABHAAV Factbook** (Powering a Resilient and Agile Bharat for the Advancement of Visionary Startups) and **Bharat Startup Challenge** at the celebration of 9 years of Startup India in New Delhi, Delhi.

ii. In January 2025, **Devendra Fadnavis**, Chief Minister (CM) of Maharashtra signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with SIDBI to establish a Rs 100 crore fund aimed at strengthening startups and small businesses in the state.

iii. Startup Policy Forum (**SPF**), with the support of **DPIIT** and **Startup India**, launched two flagship initiatives namely, 'Startup Baithak' and 'Startup Baatchet' to celebrate National Startup Day 2025.

- The event was held from January 15 to January 16, 2025 at iconic Group-20 (G20) Summit room in Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi (Delhi).

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI):

Union Minister- Piyush Goyal (Constituency- Mumbai North, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (MoS)- Jitin Prasada (Constituency- Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

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- Startup India initiative is being implemented by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry (**MoC&I**).

Key Accomplishments of Startup India:

i. Indian cities like: Bengaluru (Karnataka), Hyderabad (Telangana), Mumbai (Maharashtra), and Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) emerged as major hubs for startups in India, while smaller cities have increasingly contributed to India's entrepreneurial momentum.

ii. As of October 31, 2024, a total of **73,151** recognized startups include minimum one women director, demonstrating the increase of women entrepreneurs in India.

iv. Over 16.6 lakh direct jobs have reportedly been created by DPIIT recognized startups across various sectors, from 2016 to October 31, 2024.

- The **Information Technology (IT) Services** industry with **2.04 lakh jobs**, has topped among the industries which created maximum number of jobs in startups, followed by Healthcare & Lifesciences (1.47 lakh jobs), and Professional & Commercial Services (with around 94,000 jobs).

Flagships Schemes Implemented under Startup India:

i.Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS): It was launched for a period of 4 years starting from 2021-22 with budget outlay of Rs 945 crore.

- The main objective of the scheme is to support startups in areas like: proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, among others.

ii.Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS): The scheme provides credit guarantees for loans provided to DPIIT-recognised startups by scheduled commercial banks, Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs), and Venture Debt Funds under Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).

- It is being implemented by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited **(NCGTC)**.
- As of October 31, 2024, Rs 555.24 crore in loans were guaranteed to 235 startups, including Rs 24.60 crore to 18 women-led startups under this scheme.

iii.Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) Scheme: It was launched in June 2016 with budget outlay of Rs 10,000 crore. The scheme aims to improve access to domestic capital for Indian startups and promote the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- The scheme is being managed by Small Industries Development Bank of India **(SIDBI)**, does not invest directly in startups but provides funding to SEBI-registered AIFs which further invest in startups through equity and equity-linked instruments.
- By 2024, Rs 11,148 crore was committed, attracting investments of Rs 21,221.36 crore in 1,165 startups.

About BHASKAR initiative:

In September 2024, DPIIT launched the Bharat Startup Knowledge Access Registry **(BHASKAR) platform**, a cutting-edge initiative which is a part of the Startup India initiative. The initiative aimed to streamline and centralize interactions within India's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- It also aims to foster innovation, collaboration and growth by connecting startups, investors, mentors, service providers, and government bodies.

About Startup Mahakumbh:

i.The Startup Mahakumbh which is considered one of the largest get-together of startups, unicorns, investors, and various other ecosystem stakeholders under one roof.

- The 1st edition of Startup Mahakumbh was held in 2024, which hosted over 1,300 exhibitors, showcased across 10 thematic pavilions.
- It was jointly organised by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), Bootstrap Incubation & Advisory Foundation; The IndUS Entrepreneurs (TiE) and Indian Venture and Alternate Capital Association (IVCA).

ii.The 2nd edition is scheduled to be held from April 03 to April 05, 2025 at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi (Delhi) under the theme "Startup India @ 2047- Unfolding the Bharat Story".

Startup Funding in India Increased to USD 115 billion from USD 8 billion: DPIIT

In January 2025, DPIIT released figures of startup performance in India as a curtain raiser to commemorate National Startup Day on January 16. As per the DPIIT data, startup funding in India has increased significantly from just USD 8 billion (in 2016) to **USD 115 billion (in 2024)**.

- It also revealed that the number of states and Union Territories (UTs) with dedicated startup policies has increased from 4 (in 2016) to 31 (in 2024).

Key Findings about Startups in India:

i. The data showed that number of unicorns in India increased from just 8 (in 2016) to 118 (in 2024).

Note: Unicorns are startups valued at least a billion dollars but not yet listed on a public exchange.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal Launched PRABHAAV Factbook, Bharat Startup Challenge on 9th Foundation Day of Startup India

On January 16 2025, Union Minister Piyush Goyal, MoC&I launched two key initiatives including the **PRABHAAV Factbook** (Powering a Resilient and Agile Bharat for the Advancement of Visionary Startups) and **Bharat Startup Challenge** at the celebration of 9 years of Startup India in New Delhi, Delhi.

About Newly Launched Initiatives:

i. PRABHAAV Factbook will act as the ultimate guide to India's growing startup ecosystem and its growth story from 2016-2024. It will also capture the achievements of every region.

ii. Bharat Startup Challenge will unleash 75 challenges across different sectors like: Renewable Energy (RE), Agritech, Healthcare, Blockchain, Social Commerce, among others.

- The challenge will witness 20 industry leaders and innovators invite thinkers to address the challenges in above mentioned sectors.

Other Key Points:

i. He informed that India has seen **76** Initial Public Offerings (**IPOs**) for the Calendar Year (CY) 2024. Also, startups in India till date have received a total funding of **Rs 13 trillion** from GoI.

CM of Maharashtra Signed MoU with SIDBI to Establish 100 Crore Fund

In January 2025, **Devendra Fadnavis**, Chief Minister (CM) of Maharashtra signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with SIDBI to establish a Rs 100 crore fund aimed at strengthening startups and small businesses in the state.

- CM Devendra Fadnavis made the announcement about MoU during the National Startup Day programme organised by the Maharashtra State Innovation Society under the Department of Skill, Employment, Entrepreneurship and Innovation held in Mumbai, Maharashtra.
- He informed that now, **Rs 30 crore fund** will be available at every divisional centre (previously funds were managed at Mumbai).

Startup Policy Forum Launched 'Startup Baithak' and 'Startup Baatcheet' to Celebrate National Startup Day 2025

Startup Policy Forum (**SPF**), with the support of **DPIIT** and **Startup India**, launched two flagship initiatives namely, 'Startup Baithak' and 'Startup Baatcheet' to celebrate National Startup Day 2025.

- The event was held from January 15 to January 16, 2025 at iconic Group-20 (G20) Summit room in Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi (Delhi).
- During the event, key policy issues were discussed including data privacy, reverse flipping, Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance, capital market, and fintech regulations.

Key Points:

i. The Startup Baithak has featured **12** exclusive, close-door roundtables held for over two days. It saw the participation from startups such as: Swiggy, Zerodha, Razorpay, BharatPe, Physics Wallah, among others.

ii. On the sidelines of Bhaitak, SPF also organised Startup Baatcheet, an informal networking event held on January 15, 2025.

- The event brought together founders, investors, startup ecosystem enablers, policymakers, and lawmakers to capture the startup outlook for 2025.

About Startup:

Income Tax Exemption for 3 years: Startups incorporated on or after 1st April 2016 can apply for income tax exemption. The recognized startups that are granted an Inter-Ministerial Board Certificate are exempted from income- tax for a period of 3 consecutive years out of 10 years since incorporation.

Faster Exit for Startups: The Government has notified Startups as 'fast track firms' enabling them to wind up operations within 90 days vis-a-vis 180 days for other companies.

About Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI):

Union Minister- Piyush Goyal (Constituency- Mumbai North, Maharashtra)

Minister of State (MoS)- Jitin Prasada (Constituency- Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia Launches Sanchar Saathi App, NBM 2.0 and ICR Facility to Boost Telecom Connectivity

In January 2025, Union Minister **Jyotiraditya Madhavrao Scindia**, Ministry of Communications (MoC), introduced several citizen-focused initiatives, including the launch of the **Sanchar Saathi Mobile Application (App)**, the unveiling of the National Broadband Mission **(NBM) 2.0**, and the inauguration of the Intra Circle Roaming**(ICR) facility** at Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN)-funded 4G (fourth generation) mobile sites in New Delhi, Delhi.

i.The Sanchar Saathi Mobile App is a user-friendly platform aimed at enhancing telecom security and empowering citizens. It enables users to secure their telecom services and protect against fraud.

ii.NBM 2.0, is an expansion of the earlier NBM 1.0 and aims to further develop India's digital infrastructure.

- Under NBM 2.0, the government intends to connect the remaining 1.7 lakh villages and improve the broadband speed to 100 Mbps (Megabits per second).

iii.With the launch of Intra Circle Roaming (ICR) at Digital Bharat Nidhi **(DBN)**-funded 4G sites, **subscribers of multiple** Telecom Service Providers **(TSPs)** can now access 4G services from the same tower, improving connectivity with lower costs.

In January 2025, Union Minister **Jyotiraditya Madhavrao Scindia**, Ministry of Communications (MoC), introduced several citizen-focused initiatives, including the launch of the **Sanchar Saathi Mobile Application (App)**, the unveiling of the National Broadband Mission **(NBM) 2.0**, and the inauguration of the Intra Circle Roaming**(ICR) facility** at Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN)-funded 4G (fourth generation) mobile sites in New Delhi, Delhi.

About Sanchar Saathi Mobile Application (App):

The Sanchar Saathi Mobile App is a user-friendly platform aimed at enhancing telecom security and empowering citizens. It enables users to secure their telecom services and protect against fraud.

Key features:

i.Chakshu: Allows users to report Suspected Fraudulent Communications (**SFC**) such as calls and SMS (Short Message Service) directly from mobile logs.

ii.Citizens can **monitor** all mobile connections registered in their name to prevent unauthorized usage.

iii.Users can **block, trace, and recover** lost or stolen devices.The app helps users verify the authenticity of mobile handsets, ensuring they purchase genuine products.

Note: Sanchar Saathi portal was launched in 2023 by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), MoC.

About National Broadband Mission (NBM) 2.0:

NBM 2.0, is an expansion of the earlier NBM 1.0 and aims to further develop India's digital infrastructure.

- Under NBM 2.0, the government intends to connect the remaining 1.7 lakh villages and improve the broadband speed to 100 Mbps (Megabits per second).

Key features:

i.Extending Optical Fibre Cable (**OFC**) connectivity to 2.7 lakh villages by 2030.

iiProviding **broadband access to 90%** of essential institutions like schools, healthcare centers, and Panchayat offices by 2030.

iii.Improving the national average broadband **download speed** from 63.55 Mbps to **100 Mbps** by 2030.

iv.Mapping government-owned fibre networks by 2026.

v.Reducing Right of Way (**RoW**) application processing time from 60 days to 30 days by 2030.

vi.Increasing the number of rural internet subscribers , Ensuring 30% of mobile towers are powered by sustainable energy by 2030.

vii.Promoting the use of the Call Before u Dig (**CBuD**) app which was launched in 2023, Collaboration with various stakeholders will ensure the implementation of the (Right of Way) RoW Rules 2024.

viii.Leveraging Optical Ground Wire (**OPGW**) from the power sector will improve broadband connectivity and network resilience, particularly in remote areas.

Note: NBM 1.0, was launched in 2019 as part of the National Digital Communications Policy(NDCP) 2018.

About Intra Circle Roaming(ICR) facility:

With the launch of Intra Circle Roaming (ICR) at Digital Bharat Nidhi (**DBN**)-funded 4G sites, **subscribers of multiple** Telecom Service Providers (**TSPs**) can now access 4G services from the same tower, improving connectivity with lower costs.

- It will provide **seamless 4G access** to over 35,400 villages across approximately 27,000 towers.

Note: The **DBN**, formerly Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), funds mobile towers to improve telecom connectivity in rural areas.

Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar Launched the Toolkit for 9th Edition of Swachh Survekshan

In January 2025, Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (**MoHUA**) launched the toolkit for 9th edition of Swachh Survekshan (**SS**), the world's largest urban cleanliness survey, in its new version- simpler, sharper, systematic and all-inclusive.

- A special category- Super Swachh League (**SSL**) has been introduced for the year 2024, creating a separate league of cities performing well in cleanliness.
- SS which was initially launched by MoHUA in 2016 promotes urban sanitation improvement through citizen participation and 3rd -party validation.

i.Cities have been classified into 5 population categories: **Very Small, Small, Medium, Big, and Medium-Plus.**

- Each category will be examined based on population and parameters customised to its specific size and requirements.

ii.The last and final phase of SS- Field Assessment for the 9th edition will start on **February 15, 2025** and will be completed by the end of March 2025.

About Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA):

Union Minister- Manohar Lal Khattar (Constituency- Karnal, Haryana)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – Tokhan Sahu (Constituency- Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh)

In January 2025, Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (**MoHUA**) launched the toolkit for **9th** edition of '**Swachh Survekshan(SS)**', the world's largest urban cleanliness survey, in its new version- simpler, sharper, systematic and all-inclusive.

- A special category- Super Swachh League (**SSL**) has been introduced for the year 2024, creating a separate league of cities performing well in cleanliness.
- SS which was initially launched by MoHUA in 2016 promotes urban sanitation improvement through citizen participation and 3rd party validation.

Key People: S. Katikithala, Secretary of MoHUA; Roopa Mishra, Managing Director (MD), Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBM-U); Principal Secretaries of Urban Development, State Mission Directors, Municipal Commissioners (MCs) representatives from various States and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and officials from the MoHUA were present at the event.

Key Features :

i.Cities have been classified into **5** population categories: **Very Small**(less than 20,000 population), **Small** (20,000- 50,000 population), **Medium** (50,000- 3lakh population), **Big**(3- 10 lakh population), and **Medium-Plus**(more than 10 lakh population).

- Each category will be examined based on population and parameters customised to its specific size and requirements.
- For each category, awards will be given to clean cities, thus making new SS inclusive.

ii.This year, the assessment will include Cleanliness Target Units (**CTUs**) and adopting Swabhav Swachhata Sanskar Swachhata(4S) (behavior change in daily lives).

iii.The assessment will focus on key parameters like: eliminating dark spots, visible cleanliness, setting up Reduce Reuse Recycle(RRR) Centres, and more.

- Also, school assessments have been introduced this year as part of SS, to foster the integration of swachhata values in educational institutions and inspire young minds to adopt cleanliness and sustainability.

iv.All indicators in the new SS toolkit have been organised into **10** buckets, with assessment parameters simplified for better understanding by the ULBs.

- These are: visible cleanliness; segregation, collection and transportation of waste; solid waste management; access to sanitation; used water management; mechanization of desludging services; advocacy for Swachhata; strengthening of eco-system & institutional parameters; overall welfare of sanitation workers and citizen feedback and grievance redressal.

v.The last and final phase of SS- Field Assessment for the 9th edition will start on **February 15, 2025** and will be completed by the end of **March 2025**.

About Super Swachh League:

i.The cities who have been in the top 3 rankings for minimum 2 years in the last 3 years (2021-23) will be included in this league.

- Based on the above mentioned parameters, **12 cities** have been included in the SSL.
- Also, top 3 ranking cities in each population category will be included in the league for the subsequent years.

ii.ULBs in SSL will be evaluated on additional aspirational indicators and are required to maintain a score of 85% or higher to retain their position.

iii.Cities which are included in the SSL are:

Indian Armed Forces Conducts 'Exercise Devil Strike'

The Indian Armed Forces conducted '**Exercise Devil Strike**', a joint exercise involving the elite airborne forces of the Indian Army (**IA**) and the Indian Air Force (**IAF**) from January 16-19, 2025 at the training areas and firing ranges, validating critical drills and improving operational preparedness.

About Exercise Devil Strike:

- i.**Exercise Devil Strike evaluates and improves logistical sustaining plans to ensure troops remain operational and well-equipped under challenging circumstances.
- ii.**It includes state-of-the-art equipment and advanced technologies that enable the precise and effective delivery of airborne forces to remote locations.
- iii.**It demonstrates the dedication of the Indian Armed Forces to sustaining operational excellence and flexibility in the constantly changing military environment.
- iv.**The exercise has improved combined operational capabilities and reaffirmed the readiness of the Indian Armed Forces to protect the interests of the country and respond effectively to any emerging threat.

About Indian Army (IA):

Chief of the Army Staff (**COAS**) – General Upendra Dwivedi

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 1895

Motto – Seva Parmo Dharma (Service Before Self)

About Indian Air Force (IAF):

Chief of the Air Staff (**CAS**) – Amar Preet Singh

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 1932

Motto – Nabha Sparsham Deeptam(Touch the sky with Glory)

ISM, CG Power and CSPL Sign Fiscal Support Agreement

In January 2025, the India Semiconductor Mission (**ISM**), Mumbai(Maharashtra) based **CG Power** and Industrial Solutions Limited(also known as Crompton Greaves Limited), and Ahmedabad , (Gujarat) based CG Semi Private Limited(**CSPL**) signed a Fiscal Support Agreement (**FSA**) to advance India's semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem.

- The agreement supports CG Power's Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (**OSAT**) facility, which was approved under the Modified Programme for Development of Semiconductor and Display Manufacturing Ecosystem.

Key Points:

i.CG Power will establish its semiconductor OSAT unit in Sanand, Gujarat, in collaboration with Renesas Electronics America Inc. and Stars Microelectronics (Thailand) Public Company Limited with an investment of **Rs 7,600 crore**.

ii.ISM will provide **50%** pari-passu fiscal support for the project's eligible Capital expenditures(CAPEX), demonstrating the commitment of the Government of India (GoI) to strengthening India's position as a major participant in the global semiconductor value chain.

iii.CG Power will contribute significantly to India's goal of reaching the USD 500 billion production target in electronics by 2030.

Note: India has set a target of reaching USD 500 billion worth of electronics production by 2030.

About India Semiconductor Mission (ISM):

i.The ISM was launched in **2021** with a total financial outlay of **Rs 76,000 crore** under the aegis of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**).

- It has been set up as an Independent Business Division within Digital India Corporation(DIC).

ii.It aims to provide financial support to companies investing in semiconductors, display manufacturing and design ecosystems.

iii.The following four schemes have been introduced under the programme:

- Modified Scheme for setting up of Semiconductor Fabs in India.
- Modified Scheme for setting up of Display Fabs in India.
- Modified Scheme for setting up of Compound Semiconductors/Silicon Photonics/ Sensors Fab and Semiconductor Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging (ATMP)/OSAT facilities in India.
- Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme.

FIU-IND & NHB ink MOU to enhance coordination and information exchange

In January 2025, New Delhi (Delhi) based Financial Intelligence Unit-India (**FIU-IND**) under the Department of Revenue (DoR), Ministry of Finance (MoF) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with New Delhi (Delhi) based National Housing Bank (**NHB**), under **MoF** to collaborate on a range of critical areas, including intelligence sharing, capacity building and risk assessment.

- It aims to strengthen the implementation of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA), and its associated rules as part of ongoing efforts.

Signatories:

The MoU was signed by **Vivek Aggarwal**, Director of FIU-IND, and **Sanjay Shukla**, Managing Director (MD) of NHB, along with other dignitaries present at the event in New Delhi, Delhi.

FIU-IND and NHB will collaborate in areas of mutual interest, including the following:

- i.** Each party will appoint a nodal officer and an alternate nodal officer to coordinate with the other.
- ii.** Sharing relevant intelligence and information from their databases as outlined in the MoU.
- iii.** Establishing the procedure and manner in which supervised/reporting entities report to FIU-IND under the PML Rules.
- iv.** Providing outreach and training for supervised/reporting entities.
- v.** Enhancing Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Counter Financing of Terrorism (CFT) skills in supervised/reporting entities.
- vi.** Assessment of AML/CFT risks and vulnerabilities in Housing Finance Companies in India.
- vii.** Identifying red flag indicators for Suspicious Transaction Reports HFCs in India.
- viii.** Supervising and monitoring the compliance of supervised/reporting entities with their obligations under PMLA, PML Rules, and Reserve Bank of India (RBI)/NHB guidelines.
- ix.** Complying with each other's obligations under relevant international standards.
- x.** Conducting quarterly meetings to discuss the above, along with typologies/trends in AML/CFT crimes, cases with imposed sanctions, etc.

About Financial Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND):

It is responsible for receiving, processing, analyzing, and disseminating information related to suspicious financial transactions under the PMLA.

Director – Vivek Aggarwal

Headquarters – New Delhi (Delhi)

Founded – 2004

About National Housing Bank (NHB):

Managing Director (MD) – Sanjay Shukla

Headquarters – New Delhi (Delhi)

Founded – 1988

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

QS World Future Skills Index 2025: USA topped; India ranked 25th

In January 2025, London (the United Kingdom, UK-based Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) released its first ['World Future Skills Index 2025'](#). **India** secured **25th** position globally earning a score of **76.6**, which classifies it as a "future skills contender."

- India secured the **2nd** position globally, behind the United States of America (USA) in the **'Future of Work'** category indicating its strong readiness for technology-driven roles and industries of the future, especially in digital skills, artificial intelligence (AI), and green technologies.
- The **USA** leads the rankings with a score of **97.6**, followed by the UK (97.1), Germany (94.6), Australia (93.3), and Canada (91.0) in the top 5 positions, categorized as "future skills pioneers."

Overall Ranking:

Rank	Country	Score
1	USA	97.6
2	UK	97.1
3	Germany	94.6
4	Australia	93.3
5	Canada	91.0
25	India	76.6

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About the QS World Future Skills Index:

i.The QS World Future Skills Index is a thorough assessment that evaluates how effectively countries are preparing to address the changing needs of the global job market.

ii.The index assesses four main areas: skills fit, academic readiness, future of work, economic transformation.

iii.**The assessment covers:** Over 190 countries, 280 million job postings, 5,000 universities, 5 million employer skill requirements, and 17.5 million research papers were analysed to compile the rankings.

Highlights of the Report:

i.India scored only **15.6** in the sub-parameter focused on future-oriented innovation in sustainability.

- India has maintained its position as the 2nd-largest destination for Venture Capital (**VC**) funding in the **Asia-Pacific** region.

ii.For the Skills Fit indicator, India had a score of 59.1 and global ranking 37th while for academic readiness its score stood at 89.9 and 26th position. On the economic transformation index, India stood at 40th position with a score of 58.3.

iii.Group of 7 (**G7**) countries scored **68.3**, showing India's need for increased investment and innovation in sustainable practices.

Overall Ranking:

Rank	Country	Score
1	USA	97.6
2	UK	97.1
3	Germany	94.6
4	Australia	93.3
5	Canada	91.0
25	India	76.6

Skills Fit indicator:

Rank	Country	Score
1	United Kingdom (UK)	100
2	USA (United States of America)	94.4
3	Canada	90.9
37	India	59.1

Academic Readiness indicator :

Rank	Country	Score
1	UK	100
2	Germany	99.6
3	Netherlands	99.3
26	India	89.9

Future of Work indicator :

Rank	Country	Score
1	USA	100
2	India	99.1
3	Mexico	98.2

Economic Transformation Indicator:

Rank	Country	Score
1	South Korea	100
2	Israel	98.9
3	USA	97.9
40	India	58.3

Key Recommendations :

i. Curriculum Evolution: Universities should integrate creativity, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial thinking into their curriculum to improve students with the skills needed for the future.

ii. Industry-Academia Collaboration is necessary to ensure that educational programs align more closely with real-world job demands.

iii. Reskilling and Upskilling: Initiatives like the National Education Policy (**NEP**) 2020 and Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society (**ULLAS**), to support the reskilling and upskilling of the workforce.

ILO's WESO Report 2025: Global unemployment slow down at 5%

On January 18 2025, the International Labour Organization (**ILO**) released its flagship report titled '[World Employment and Social Outlook : Trends 2025\(WESO Trends 2025\)](#)', highlighting the current state of global labour markets and the social outlook. The report provides an in-depth analysis of global employment trends, challenges, and prospects for the near future.

- According to the report, the global unemployment rate slowed down at **5%** in 2024 and is projected to tick lower again in 2026 to 4.9%. However, Youth unemployment remain high at **12.6%** in 2024.
- The unemployment rates for the overall number of jobs missing, stood around **402.4 million** in 2024 globally.

Highlights of the Report:

i.According to the report, Global growth rates remain stable, hovering around **3.2%** in 2024 and 2025.

- Inflation rates have come down from **6.7%** in 2023 to 5.9% in 2024 and are expected to decelerate further in 2025.

ii.The global Labour Force Participation Rate(**LFPR**) remained at **61%** in 2024.

iii.According to the report, the unemployment rate in **India** is projected to grow by **6.2%** in **2024** and **5.8%** in **2025**.

About International Labour Organization (ILO):

Director- General (**DG**)- Gilbert Fossoun HOUNGBO

Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland

Established- 1919

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- The unemployment rates for the overall number of jobs missing, stood around **402.4 million** in 2024 globally.

Highlights of the Report:

Global Economic Recovery:

i. According to the report, Global growth rates remain stable, hovering around **3.2%** in 2024 and 2025.

- Inflation rates have come down from **6.7%** in 2023 to 5.9% in 2024 and are expected to decelerate further in 2025.

ii. The global Labour Force Participation Rate (**LFPR**) remained at **61%** in 2024.

iii. In 2024, the number of young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (**NEET**) in Low-Income Countries (**LICs**) increased.

- Around 15.8 million young men (20.4%) and 28.2 million young women (37.0%) were **NEET**, which is an increase of 500,000 and 700,000 compared to 2023.

iii. Globally, there were 85.8 million young men (13.1%) and 173.3 million young women (28.2%) who were **NEET** in 2024, marking an increase of 1 million and 1.8 million, respectively, in 2023.

iv. The global jobs gap in 2024 is estimated to reach **402.4 million** people, that includes 186 million unemployed people, 137 million discouraged workers, and 79 million people who want to work but are unable to due to other responsibilities like caring for others.

Southern Asia Recovery:

The ILO report indicates a strong economic performance in **Southern Asia** which is expected to experience a **6.2%** growth in Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) in 2024, with a slight slowdown to **5.8%** in **2025**.

- While some European countries like **South Africa**, reported unemployment fall at stubbornly high levels above **30%** in 2024.

National Economic Recovery:

i.According to the report, the unemployment rate in **India** is projected to grow by **6.2%** in **2024** and **5.8%** in **2025**.

iii.This performance is primarily attributed to **monetary policy easing**, robust domestic demand, and public investment in infrastructure.

About International Labour Organization (ILO):

Director- General (**DG**)- Gilbert Fossoun Hounbo

Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland

Established- 1919

Highlights of EAM S.Jaishankar's Visit to Spain from 13th to 14th January 2025

Union Minister **S. Jaishankar**, Ministry of External Affairs(MEA) made a **2-day visit** to Spain from January 13th to 14th, 2025 which marks his second visit to Spain and first visit as External Affairs Minister(EAM).

- During his visit to Spain, Union Minister Jaishankar met the Spanish King Felipe VI and President Pedro Sanchez.

i.India and Spain signed two Memorandum of Understanding (**MoUs**) that focused on cooperation in **sports** and **sustainable urban development**.

iii.Addressing the Indian diaspora in Spain, Union Minister Jaishankar highlighted that **2026** has been designated as a '**Dual Year**' to celebrate cultural exchange, tourism, and advancements in AI between the two nations

iii.On January 13 2025, Union Minister Jaishankar was addressed at the 9th Annual Conference of Spanish Ambassadors held in Madrid, Spain . The theme of the Conference was '**A Foreign Policy with Our Own Identity**'.

About Spain:

Prime Minister(**PM**)– Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón

Capital– Madrid

Currency– Euro(EUR)

Union Minister **S. Jaishankar**, Ministry of External Affairs(MEA) made a **2-day visit** to Spain from January 13th to 14th, 2025 which marks his second visit to Spain and first visit as External Affairs Minister(EAM).

- The aim of the visit was to meet the leadership of Spain and hold wide range discussions with the Spain's Foreign Minister **Manuel Albares**.
- He also addressed the 9th Annual Conference of Spanish Ambassadors and met the Indian community.

Note: Spanish President **Pedro Sanchez** made an official visit to India in October 2024 at the invitation of Prime Minister(PM) Narendra Modi.

Highlights of the visit:

i. During his visit to Spain, Union Minister Jaishankar met the Spanish King Felipe VI and President Pedro Sanchez.

ii. Both the countries discussed upon bilateral partnerships including trade, investment, defense, security, urban development, railways, green hydrogen, climate action and people-to-people ties.

- They also discussed ways of increasing collaboration in new and emerging sectors of digital technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Renewable Energy (RE), and space.

iii. During the meeting, India and Spain signed two Memorandum of Understanding (**MoUs**) that focused on cooperation in **sports** and **sustainable urban development**.

iii. Addressing the Indian diaspora in Spain, Union Minister Jaishankar highlighted that **2026** has been designated as a '**Dual Year**' to celebrate cultural exchange, tourism, and advancements in AI between the two nations.

- He also announced that Spain will establish a consulate in Bengaluru (Karnataka) to strengthen the bilateral relations between India and Spain.

iv. He mentioned that over **230** Spanish companies currently operate in India and urged Spain to contribute to India's "**Make in India**" initiative.

- The two countries have made significant developments in defense and security, with special focus on setting up of **C-295 Aircraft** Assembly line plant at Vadodara, Gujarat.

9th Annual Conference of Spanish Ambassadors:

i.On January 13 2025, Union Minister Jaishankar was addressed at the 9th Annual Conference of Spanish Ambassadors held in Madrid, Spain .The theme of the Conference was '**A Foreign Policy with Our Own Identity**'.

ii.He became the first foreign ambassador /foreign minister to address the global conference of Spanish ambassadors.

Points to Note:

i.India's annual trade with **Mediterranean** countries stands at **USD 80 billion** and its companies operating ports in the Mediterranean region and involvement in defense, security, and green hydrogen projects.

ii.India and Spain currently have an annual trade worth **USD 10 billion**, with collaborations in railways, clean technology, drones, and space exploration.

About Spain:

Prime Minister(**PM**)– Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón

Capital– Madrid

Currency– Euro(EUR)

Nigeria Joined BRICS as the 9th Partner Country

In January 2025, the government of Brazil, which holds the BRICS (**B**razil, **R**ussia, **I**ndia, **C**hina and **S**outh Africa) bloc presidency in 2025, announced that **Nigeria**, the world's 6th largest population and Africa's largest country, has officially joined BRICS as the **9th** Partner Country,

- Other Partner countries of BRICS bloc are: Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan.

About BRICS:

i. BRIC, as a formal grouping, initiated following the meeting of the leaders of Russia, India, and China held in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2006.

ii. The grouping was formalized during the 1st meeting of foreign ministers of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries held on the sidelines of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, the United States of America (USA) in 2006.

- The 1st BRIC Summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia in 2009.

iii. BRIC group was renamed as BRICS after South Africa was accepted as full member of BRIC in 2010.

iv. 16th BRICS Summit was held under the chairmanship of Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, in Kazan (Russia) from October 22 to 24, 2024.

- Theme: "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security".

New Member Countries of BRICS Bloc:

i. In January 2024, countries namely Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) officially joined BRICS bloc.

ii. In January 2025, **Indonesia** formally became the full member of the BRICS bloc. With this, it has become the 1st SouthEast (SE) Asian country to join this bloc.

About Nigeria:

Capital- Abuja

President- Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Adegunle Tinubu

Currency- Nigeria Naira (**NGN**)

USA Removed BARC, IGCAR and IREL From Restrictive Entity List

In January 2025, the United States of America (USA)'s Bureau of Industry & Security (**BIS**) has **removed 3** prominent Indian nuclear entities from its restrictive Entity List. This move aims to strengthen bilateral ties between India and USA and also focus on promoting advanced energy cooperation.

- The entities removed from the USA entity list are: Trombay, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Bhabha Atomic Research Center (**BARC**), Department of Atomic Energy(DAE); Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based **IREL (India) Limited**(formerly Indian Rare Earths Ltd); and Kalpakkam (Tamil Nadu, TN)-based Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (**IGCAR**).
- The updated listing also includes modifications to one existing entry of India.

Note: The USA has imposed restrictions on more than 200 Indian entities following India conducted nuclear tests in Pokhran, Rajasthan in 1998.

About US Entity List:

- i.The list is prepared by USA's BIS which publishes the names of certain foreign persons, including businesses, research organisations that are subject to specific license requirements for the export, re-export and/or transfer (in-country) of specified items.
- ii.The persons whose names are included on the list are subject to individual licensing requirements and policies.
- iii.The entities on the list indicate that the USA government suspected them engaging in activities contrary to US national security or foreign policy interests.
- iv.The inclusion of name on the Entity list imposes stringent licensing requirements that complicate international business dealings.

About United States of America (USA):

President- Donald John Trump

Capital- Washington, D.C.

Currency- United States Dollar (USD)

BANKING & FINANCE

Shriram Life Insurance Launches Sunishchit Laabh Savings Plan

In January 2025, **Shriram Life Insurance** launched **Shriram Life Sunishchit Laabh**, a non-participating individual savings plan that guarantees high returns of up to 668% of the total premium paid.

i.The plan offers a combination of savings and life insurance benefits for people looking for long-term payout options and financial security.

ii.Individuals aged **30 days to 60 years** are eligible for the plan with an annual premium starting at **Rs 30,000**.

iii.This premium can be made on a Rs 15,500 half-yearly, Rs 8,000 quarterly, or Rs 3,000 monthly basis, and the plan offers tax-free maturity payouts for periods between **10 to 40 years**, up to the maximum age of **101 years**.

iv.It offers death benefits up to 160 times the annualized premium by providing additional financial security for the families of policyholders.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

India's GDP Growth Likely to Reach 6.7% in FY26: CRISIL

According to the **CRISIL Ratings Limited's** (formerly Credit Rating and Information Services of India Limited) Report, India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is likely to improve to **6.7%** in Financial Year 2025-26 (**FY26**).

- The report has outlined 3 main drivers i.e. the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) rate cuts, lower crude oil prices and a normal monsoon, that are expected to support this growth projection.

Key Findings:

i. The report cited that a sustained decrease in food inflation, along with stable non-food inflation, could possibly lead to rate cut by the RBI in the next months.

ii. As per the report, headline inflation is making progress towards the RBI's 4% inflation target as Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation has decreased from 5.5% (in November) to 5.2% (in December).

- Similarly, food inflation has declined from 9% to 8.4%, while non-food inflation remained stable at 3.1%.

iii. As per the report, CPI inflation is projected to average **4.6%** for the current fiscal year (FY25), with a slight upward bias in the forecast.

iv. The report revealed that the Index of Industrial Production (**IIP**) has increased to 5.2% in November, up from 3.7% in October (revised from previous estimate of 3.5%).

- This growth was mainly attributed to strong performance in investment goods and consumer durables, supported by a low base effect.

v. The report has estimated that agricultural growth is likely to increase, as high reservoir levels bode well for rabi crop output, which is further expected to boost farm incomes and rural consumption.

- Additionally, increased agricultural production is expected to reduce pressure on food inflation during the remainder of the current fiscal year, which could further boost discretionary consumption.

About CRISIL Ratings Limited:

Managing Director (**MD**)– Subodh Rai

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established– 1987

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Govt Extends Robert Jerard Ravi's Tenure as CMD of BSNL and MTNL

In January 2025, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications (MoC) has extended the additional charge of Chairman and Managing Director (**CMD**) of **BSNL** and **MTNL** assigned to **Robert Jerard Ravi** for another **three months** with effect from January 15, 2025, till April 14, 2025, or until further orders, whichever is earlier, subject to approval by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC).

i.Ravi is currently serving as **Deputy Director General** (Standards Research and Innovation) and was assigned additional charge of telecom public sector undertakings as their CMD on July 13, 2024.

ii.He has played a vital role in finalizing the tender for the third phase of the **BharatNet** project and boosting BSNL's 4G network rollout during his tenure as CMD.

- BharatNet Phase 3 aims to provide broadband connectivity to 6.4 lakh villages and all 2.64 lakh Gram panchayats across India.

BOOKS & AUTHORS

VP Jagdeep Dhankhar launched the book "Parliament: Powers, Functions & Privileges; A Comparative Constitutional Perspective"

In January 2025, the Vice-President (VP) of India, **Jagdeep Dhankhar** launched the book "Parliament: Powers, Functions & Privileges; A Comparative Constitutional Perspective" in New Delhi (Delhi). The book was authored by **Dr. KS Chauhan**, Senior Advocate, at VP's Enclave, New Delhi(Delhi).

i.The book consists of two volumes and was published by Mohan Law House (MLH) Publishing Private Limited.

ii.The book explains about the functions of Parliament, its special rights, and its important role in holding the government accountable, especially in shaping the India's democracy.

Amitav Ghosh's new book, "Wild Fictions" addressing climate change & societal issues

On January 10 2025, A new book named '**Wild Fictions**' authored by **Amitav Ghosh** was published by the Fourth Estate India at the 41st Dr CD Deshmukh Memorial Lecture at the India International Centre (**IIC**) in New Delhi, Delhi.

- The book explores climate change, societal issues, and political instability in "time of monsters" addressing urgent global crises like biodiversity loss, climate change, and emerging diseases.

i.He is the author of several acclaimed works of fiction and non-fiction including The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide, the Ibis Trilogy (comprising the novels Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke and Flood of Fire), Gun Island, The Great Derangement, The Nutmeg's Curse, Jungle Nama and The Living Mountain.

ii.In 2019 he was the 1st English-language writer to receive the 'Jnanpith Award', India's highest literary honour for his writings on the planetary crisis and climate change.

IMPORTANT DAYS

National Disaster Response Force Raising Day 2025 – January 19

National Disaster Response Force (**NDRF**) **Raising Day** is observed annually across India on **January 19** to mark the founding of the NDRF, a special force under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

- January 19, 2025 marks the observance of the **20th** NDRF Raising Day.

Note:The NDRF, is a 'Specialist Force' to handle emergencies, trained to respond to both natural disasters like floods, cyclones, and earthquakes, and man-made disasters like chemical spills and terrorist attacks.

2025 Events:

The 20th Raising Day ceremony of the NDRF was held at the 10th Battalion of NDRF located in Kondapavuluru, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh (AP) with Union Minister **Amit Shah**, MoHA as the Chief Guest.

- During the event, Union Minister Amit Shah inaugurated several projects and laid foundation stones for various initiatives worth approximately **Rs 220 crore**. The projects include:
 - i. Inaugurated the National South Campus of the Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), AP.
 - ii. Inaugurated the 10th Battalion of NDRF.
 - iii. Inaugurated the Regional Response Centre (RRC) at Supaul (9th Battalion) Campus, AP.
 - iv. Laid foundation stone for 'Integrated Indoor Shooting Range' at the National Police Academy (NPA) in Hyderabad, Telangana worth Rs. 27 crore.
 - v. Regional Forensic Science Laboratory (RFSL) Building in Tirupati, AP.

About National Disaster Response Force (NDRF):

Director-General (**DG**)– Piyush Anand

Headquarters– New Delhi, Delhi

Established– 2006

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Background:

i.India experienced a series of devastating natural disasters between 1990 and 2004, which led to the creation of the **Disaster Management (DM) Act** on December 26, 2005.

ii.The Act paved the way for the establishment of the NDRF under Section 44, with the force being officially raised on January 19, 2006, to become India's premier disaster response unit.

- Since then, NDRF Raising Day has been observed annually on January 19.

iii.The mission is to develop and implement comprehensive plans, policies, and guidelines for effective disaster management across India.

Organization and Structure:

i. Formation and Expansion: Initially formed in 2006 with 8 battalions, NDRF at present comprises 16 battalions from various forces of personnel from Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) including: Assam Rifles (AR), Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).

ii. Team Composition: Each battalion consists of 18 specialised Search and Rescue (SAR) teams, each with 45 personnel. The teams include: Engineers, Technicians, Electricians, Dog Squads and Medical/Paramedic staffs.

iii. Total Personnel and Infrastructure: Each battalion has a strength of 1,149 personnel, with 28 Regional Response Centers (RRCs) and 24 Tactical Pre-Positioning Locations (TPLs) across India. The sanctioned strength of the force was 18,556.

- The battalions are well-equipped to handle both natural and man-made disasters, including Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) emergencies.

Achievements:

i. Rescue Operations: NDRF has rescued over 1.55 lakh lives and evacuated more than 7.88 lakh stranded individuals during critical situations.

ii. Global Interventions: The force has also provided assistance during global crises such as: Japan Triple Disaster (2011), Nepal Earthquake (2015) and Türkiye Earthquake (2023).

iii. In **2024**, NDRF conducted a record **1,038 operations**, rescuing more than 4,000 lives and evacuating 63,000 people to safety.

2025 Events:

The 20th Raising Day ceremony of the NDRF was held at the 10th Battalion of NDRF located in Kondapavuluru, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh (AP) with Union Minister, **Amit Shah**, MHA as the Chief Guest.

- During the event, Union Minister **Amit Shah** inaugurated several projects and laid foundation stones for various initiatives worth approximately **Rs 220 crore**.

Key People:

Chief Minister (CM) of AP, **N. Chandrababu Naidu**, Union Minister, **K. Rammohan**, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Union Minister of State, **Bandi Sanjay Kumar**, MHA , Home Secretary **Govind Mohan**, and NDRF Director General (DG) Piyush Anand.

The projects include:

i.Inaugurated the National South Campus of the Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), AP.

ii.Inaugurated the 10th Battalion of NDRF.

iii.Inaugurated the Regional Response Centre (RRC) at Supaul (9th Battalion) Campus, AP.

iv.Laid foundation stone for 'Integrated Indoor Shooting Range' at the National Police Academy (NPA) in Hyderabad, Telangana worth Rs. 27 crore.

- This range will be used to train Indian Police Service (IPS) probationary officers in shooting skills. The range will be 50 meters (m) long and have 10 lanes, so 10 people can practice shooting at the same time.
- It will be operational in all weather conditions and will use advanced, automated technology that meets international standards. This will be a unique facility for police forces in India.

v.Inaugurated the Regional Forensic Science Laboratory(RFSL) Building in Tirupati, AP.

About National Disaster Response Force (NDRF):

Director-General **(DG)**- Piyush Anand

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2006

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

NeGD Launches 'Entity Locker' for Business Document Management

In January 2025, the National electronic (e)Governance Division (**NeGD**), under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology(MeitY), has introduced '**Entity Locker**', a modern digital platform designed to simplify the way organisations manage and verify their documents.

- The platform **aligns** with India's Digital Public Infrastructure(DPI) and the Union Budget 2024-25's goal of advancing digital governance and simplifying business processes.

About Entity Locker:

Entity Locker is a **secure, cloud-based system** that helps businesses, including large corporations, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), trusts, startups, and societies, store, share, and verify documents. It provides a **consolidated platform** for secure document management.

i.The platform **integrates** seamlessly with key systems like the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN), and Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), reducing delays and operational challenges in document handling.

ii.Entity Locker supports various use cases, including **vendor verification** during procurement and registration, **speeding up loan applications** MSMEs and simplifying compliance documentation for the food industry under the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

iii.It also streamlines corporate filings, such as annual returns and other essential documents.

Note: Individuals **do not have direct access** to Entity Locker; instead, they can connect their personal account to the organization's account to manage and access digital documents.

Key Features:

i.The platform ensures **real-time access and accuracy** by instantly verifying documents through integration with government databases.

ii.Sensitive information is shared securely with user consent, **Aadhaar authentication** ensures secure and accountable access.

iii.The platform provides **10 gigabytes (GB)** of encrypted cloud storage for secure document management and enables authentication through legally valid digital signatures.

iv.With built-in features, the platform **simplifies regulatory reporting** and compliance, while tracking all document-related activities to enhance accountability.

Overview of Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam's visit to India from January 14 to 18, 2025

Singapore President **Tharman Shanmugaratnam**, visited India from **January 14 to 18, 2025**, marking his 1st bilateral state visit to India. He was accompanied by Chee Hong Tat, Minister for Transport and 2nd Minister for Finance and Sim Ann, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Development.

- During the visit, he held discussions with President Droupadi Murmu focused on elevating bilateral ties to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' and establishing a unique Ministerial Roundtable mechanism.

Highlights of the Visit:

i. President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam and President of India Droupadi Murmu jointly unveiled the **60th Anniversary Commemorative** logo at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

ii. During State visit to Odisha by Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, several Memoranda of Understanding (**MoUs**) were signed between the Odisha government and Singaporean organizations focused on enhancing cooperation in the fields of skills development, green energy, and industrial growth.

About Singapore:

Prime minister (**PM**)– Lawrence Wong

President– Tharman Shanmugaratnam

Capital– Singapore

Currency– Singapore Dollar (SGD)

Singapore President **Tharman Shanmugaratnam**, visited India from **January 14 to 18, 2025**, marking his 1st bilateral state visit to India. He was accompanied by Chee Hong Tat, Minister for Transport and 2nd Minister for Finance and Sim Ann, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Development.

- The visit, held at the invitation of President of India **Droupadi Murmu**, commemorated the **60th** anniversary of Singapore-India diplomatic relations.
- Singapore's President **Tharman Shanmugaratnam** visited New Delhi (Delhi) from 15 to 16 January 2025 and Odisha from 17 to 18 January 2025.
- During the visit, he held discussions with President Droupadi Murmu focused on elevating bilateral ties to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' and establishing a unique Ministerial Roundtable mechanism.

Highlights of the Visit:

Visit to Delhi:

i. During the visit, Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam met Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and other senior Indian ministers; External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar; Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH); Union Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda, Minister of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW); Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Finance (MoF).

ii. The visit highlighted the importance of Singapore's strategic role in India's **Act East Policy**, a key component of India's engagement with Southeast Asia.

60th Anniversary Commemorative Logo:

i. On January 16, 2025, President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam and President of India Droupadi Murmu jointly unveiled the **60th Anniversary Commemorative** logo at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. The logo celebrates six decades of strong ties between India & Singapore.

- The logo prominently features India's national flower, the lotus, and Singapore's national flower, the orchid, symbolizing the enduring friendship between the two nations.
- The number **60** in the logo signifies the 60 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

ii. The logo is a visual representation of the mutual trust, cooperation, and shared values that India and Singapore have fostered over the years.

Note: Bilateral trade expanded from USD 6.7 billion in the Financial Year 2004-05 (FY05) to USD 35.6 billion in FY24, making Singapore India's 6th largest trade partner.

Visit to Odisha:

i. The State visit to Odisha by Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam took place from 17-18 January 2025.

- He visited the Sun Temple at Konark, Odisha and the Bharat Biotech International Limited (vaccine manufacturing facility) in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

ii. He also toured the World Skills Centre (WSC), Bhubaneswar, which was established in collaboration with Singapore's Institute of Technical Education Education Services (ITEES), to develop advanced skills in Odisha, in the semiconductor sector.

MoUs signed:

During his visit, **several** Memorandum of Understanding (**MoUs**) were signed between the Odisha government and Singaporean organizations.

i. Skill Development and Technical Education (SD&TE) Department, Odisha and ITE Education Services (ITEES), Singapore signed MoU for enhancing Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the Semiconductor Sector. The MoU will be valid for a period of 5 years.

- The agreement focuses on improving skills in the semiconductor sector through TVET, with support for setting up zonal Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in Odisha.
- The collaboration will support skill development in emerging technologies like AI, aerospace, electronics, and renewable energy.
- The partnership will help expand the World Skill Centre (WSC), Bhubaneswar, Odisha in areas such as cyber security, cloud computing, blockchain, internet of things and data science.

ii. A tripartite agreement was signed between Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore, Grid Corporation of Odisha (GRIDCO Limited) and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar for advance Research & Development (R&D) in sustainable energy technologies.

iii. Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO) and Sembcorp Green Hydrogen India Private Limited (SGHIPL), Singapore signed a MoU to establish a green hydrogen production facility with a production capacity of 7.2 lakh tonne (t) per annum.

- The facility aims to generate over 2,000 employment opportunities during its operational phase.

iv. Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA), Odisha and SurbanaJurong Infrastructure Private Limited (a Singapore-based urban development firm), signed MoU for strategic planning and development of a new city near Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

v. Surbana Jurong Infrastructure Private Limited, Singapore signed a MoU with IDCO for Development of a Petroleum, Chemicals, and Petrochemical Investment Region (PCPIR) in Odisha.

vi. The Department of Electronics and Information Technology (E&IT), Odisha inked a pact with Global Finance and Technology Network (GFTN), Singapore to establish a global competency centre (GCC) for InsureTech industry.

About Singapore:

Prime minister (**PM**)– Lawrence Wong

President– Tharman Shanmugaratnam

Capital– Singapore

Currency– Singapore Dollar (**SGD**)

Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurated India's 1st of its kind CSIR Innovation Complex in Mumbai

In January 2025, Union Minister of State (MoS) (Independent Charge, IC) **Dr. Jitendra Singh**, Ministry of Science and Technology (MoS&T) and Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), inaugurated India's first-of-its-kind Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (**CSIR**) **Mega "Innovation Complex"** through virtual mode and dedicated it to StartUps and Industry stakeholders in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- The event was attended by Dr. V.K. Saraswat and Dr. V.K. Paul, Members of NITI Aayog; Dr. N. Kalaiselvi, Secretary of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) and Director General (DG) of CSIR; and Dr. Ram Vishwakarma.

i. The new "Innovation Complex" is a huge state-of-the-art facility that spans nine floors and has 24 "ready-to-move" incubation labs in addition to furnished office and networking spaces for industry, CSIR labs, Micro, Small, and Medium

Enterprises (MSMEs), and innovative startups.

ii. CSIR signed **6** Memorandums of Association (**MoA**) with 6 esteemed institutions, including the Indian Institute of Technology (**IIT**) **Bombay**, **iCreate**, and the National Research Development Corporation (**NRDC**), to promote innovation, industrial collaboration, and job creation.

iii. Additionally, 50 technology transfers from CSIR institutes to start-ups, MSMEs, and other organizations were formalized, further boosting industry collaboration and employment generation.

Note: India is the **third-largest** start-up ecosystem in the world, with over 100 unicorns that stand as testaments to India's entrepreneurial spirit.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Climate Change, Conflict, Digital Inequality Disrupting Children's Lives: UNICEF Report

In January 2025, United Nations Children's Fund (**UNICEF**), a humanitarian aid organisation of UN released a report titled '[Prospects for Children in 2025: Building Resilient Systems for Children's Futures](#)'. As per the report, climate change, economic instability, conflict and digital inequality are disrupting children's lives and limiting their prospects.

- The report warned that the coming year will witness a new and escalating period of crises for children worldwide.

i.Global Impact of Conflict on Children: As per the report, **more than 473 million children** i.e. more than one in six globally, lived in areas affected by conflict in 2023. The percentage of children affected by conflict has almost doubled, from around 10% (in 1990s) to almost **19%**.

ii.Children Living in Debt-Ridden Countries: The report revealed that **nearly 400 million** children live-in debt ridden countries, which hinders important investments in sectors like education, healthcare and social protection.

About United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

Executive Director (**ED**)– Catherine Mary Russell

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Established- 1946

Member Countries- 190

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- The report warned that the coming year will witness a new and escalating period of crises for children worldwide.
- The report emphasized the urgent need to bolster national systems to protect children from global crisis and provide necessary support.

Key Findings:

i.Global Impact of Conflict on Children: As per the report, **more than 473 million children** i.e. more than one in six globally, lived in areas affected by conflict in 2023. The percentage of children affected by conflict has almost doubled, from around 10% (in 1990s) to almost **19%**.

- The report highlighted that apart from risks to their lives, children face other risks such as: displacement, threat of starvation, disease and also substantial risks to their psychological well-being.
- The report observed that governments worldwide are finding it more difficult to finance important investments in children. This pressure reflects on various factors including consistent inflation effects, faltering development assistance and low revenues from domestic taxation.

ii.Children Living in Debt-Ridden Countries: The report revealed that **nearly 400 million children** live-in debt ridden countries, which hinders important investments in sectors like education, healthcare and social protection.

- The report noted that among the 34 African Union (AU) countries (as per the available data), 15 now allocate more to debt servicing than to education.
- Also, as per the World Bank (WB) estimates, each 5% increase in external debt in Low-and-Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) could decrease education expenditure by **USD 12.8 billion**.

iii.LMICs Spend More on Debt-Servicing than Crucial Sectors for Children: The report indicated that **more than 40 LMICs** spend double on debt-servicing as on health, for instance countries like: Indonesia (2.4 times as much), Pakistan (5 times as much).

- As per the report, debt service now consumes 11 times as much as social protection spending across developing countries, leaving 1.8 billion children exposed to economic shocks that push families deeper into poverty.

iv. Insufficient Climate Finance: The report showed that **only 2.4%** of multilateral climate finance is allocated to child-responsive initiatives, which support projects aimed at protecting children.

- This indicates that climate resilience of essential services for children is deteriorating.

v. Inequitable Access to Digital Services: The report highlighted the emergence of Digital Public Infrastructure (**DPI**), which is a set of shared digital systems that provide equitable access to public and private services.

- The report noted the persistent inequalities in digital access, particularly in Least-Developed Countries (LDCs).
- It showed that most young people from High Income Countries (HICs) have access to the internet, while only 53% of the youth (aged 15-24 years) have access to the internet in Africa.
- As per the report, adolescent girls are particularly affected, as are children with disabilities. It revealed that 9 out of 10 adolescent girls and young women (aged 15-24 years) have no internet access in LMICs.

vi. Economy: Economic prospects in emerging markets are discouraging, with growth well below the 7% target set in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- A mix of pandemic scarring, climate shocks, and resource constraints means emerging markets' growth prospects have fallen from historical averages of 5.6% to just 4% by 2026–2029.

About United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

Executive Director (**ED**)- Catherine Mary Russell

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Established- 1946

Member Countries- 190

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI Released NBFC Upper Layer List for 2024-25

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released the list of Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) in the Upper Layer (UL) segment under the Scale Based Regulation (SBR) for NBFCs for the year 2024-25.

- RBI has retained **Tata Sons Private Limited** in the NBFC UL list despite its request to de-register as a NBFC, is under examination.

i.The updated list comprises **15** companies that include Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) Housing Finance Limited (HFL), Bajaj Finance Limited (BHL), and Shriram Finance Limited (SFL), among others.

ii.Muthoot Finance Limited (MFIN), a flagship of Muthoot Group is the only gold loan NBFC included in RBI's 'UL' list for 3 consecutive years.

iii.Piramal Enterprise Limited(PEL), which qualified for inclusion on the list based on scoring, has been eliminated for the year 2024-25 due to ongoing reorganization in the business group.

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- The updated list comprises **15** companies that include Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) Housing Finance Limited (HFL), Bajaj Finance Limited (BHL), and Shriram Finance Limited (SFL), among others.

Key Points:

i.Muthoot Finance Limited (MFIN), a flagship of Muthoot Group is the **only gold loan NBFC** included in the RBI's 'UL' list for three consecutive years.

- The company received UL status for the 1st time in FY23.

ii.Piramal Enterprise Limited(PEL), which qualified for inclusion on the list based on scoring, has been eliminated for the year 2024-25 due to ongoing reorganization in the business group.

List of NBFC-UL for 2024-25:

S.No.	Name of the NBFC	Category of the NBFC
1	LIC Housing Finance Limited	Deposit taking Housing Finance Company (HFC)
2	Bajaj Finance Limited (BFL)	Deposit taking NBFC-Investment Credit Company (ICC)
3	Shriram Finance Limited (SFL) (formerly Shriram Transport Finance Company)	Deposit taking NBFC-ICC
4	Tata Sons Private Limited	Core Investment Company (CIC)
5	Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company Limited (Chola)	Non-Deposit taking NBFC- ICC
6	L&T Finance Limited (formerly known as L&T Finance Holdings Limited)	Non-deposit taking NBFC-ICC
7	Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services Limited (MMFSL)	Deposit taking NBFC-ICC
8	Aditya Birla Finance Limited (ABFL)	Non-Deposit taking NBFC-ICC
9	Tata Capital Financial Services Limited (TCFSL)	Non-deposit taking NBFC-ICC
10	Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited(PCHFL)	Non-deposit taking HFC
11	PNB Housing Finance Limited	Deposit taking HFC
12	HDB Financial Services Limited(HDBFS)	Non-deposit taking NBFC-ICC
13	Muthoot Finance Limited (MFIN)	Non-deposit taking NBFC-ICC
14	Samman Capital Limited (SCL) (formerly Indiabulls Housing Finance, IBHFL)	Non-deposit taking NBFC
15	Bajaj Housing Finance Limited (BHFL)	Non-deposit taking HFC

About SBR Framework:

i. In October 2021, the RBI introduced the SBR framework, which classifies NBFCs into 4 different layers based on their asset size and scoring methodology.

ii. 4 different layers under which NBFCs are categorised:

- **NBFC-BL (Base Layer, BL):** It mainly consists of non-deposit taking NBFCs with assets less than Rs 1,000 crore.
- **NBFC-ML (Middle Layer, ML):** It consists of all-deposit taking NBFCs and non-deposit taking NBFCs with assets more than Rs 1,000 crore.
- **NBFC-UL (Upper Layer, UL):** NBFCs in this layer are subjected to enhanced regulatory requirements for at least 5 years, even if they fail to meet the criteria in subsequent reviews.
- **NBFC-TL (Top Layer, TL):** NBFC-UL will be moved to TL if RBI recognizes a substantial increase in the potential systemic risk.

Recent Related News:

According to the CRISIL Ratings Limited (formerly Credit Rating and Information Services of India Limited), India's 1st credit rating agency, the growth in Assets Under Management (AUM) of Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) is expected to moderate to 15-17% in Financial Year 2024-25 (FY25) as well as in FY26.

- This marks a sharp decline of 600-800 basis points (bps) from a strong growth of 23% in FY24.

IDFC FIRST Bank Unveils 'FIRST EA᳚N RuPay Credit Card'

On January 20 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **IDFC FIRST Bank Limited**, in partnership with National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) developed **Rupay**, a global card payment network from India, launched the Unified Payments Interface (UPI)-enabled '**FIRST EA᳚N RuPay Credit Card**'.

About FIRST EA᳚N RuPay Credit Card:

i. Backed by a Fixed Deposit (FD), this card is instantly available online to everyone and offers cashback on UPI payments.

ii. It lets customers access credit on UPI, earn rewards, and enjoy attractive interest on FD simultaneously.

iii. Eligibility:

- Must be an Indian citizen
- Over 18 years of age
- Have a minimum FD of Rs. 5,000 with the bank

Key Features:

i. Seamless UPI Integration: Use the card for UPI transactions at over 60 million Quick-Response (QR) code locations.

ii. Instant Card Issuance: Get a virtual credit card instantly with seamless UPI integration for immediate use.

iii. Cashback Offer: New cardholders get 100% cashback on their first UPI transaction (up to Rs. 500) within 15 days, effectively refunding the first year's fees.

iv. Rewards:

- Up to 1% cashback on UPI transactions via the IDFC FIRST Bank application (app).
- 0.5% cashback on transactions made through other UPI apps, as well as on insurance, utility bill payments, and e-commerce purchases.
- Enjoy a 25% discount, up to Rs. 100, on District by Zomato movie tickets.

v. Interest on Fixed Deposit: Earn 7.25% per annum (p.a.) interest on 1 year 1 day FD.

vi. Comprehensive Protection:

- Complimentary roadside assistance valued at Rs. 1,399.
- Lost card liability coverage of up to Rs. 25,000.
- Personal accident coverage of up to Rs. 2,00,000.

About IDFC FIRST Bank Limited

Managing Director (MD) & Chief Executive Officer (CEO): V. Vaidyanathan

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established – 2018

Tagline – Always You First

GlobalData: HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank & SBI Rank Among Top 25 Global Banks by Market Cap; JP Morgan Chase Tops the List

In January 2025, London, the United Kingdom (UK) based data analytics and research company **GlobalData Plc** released a report on the [Top 25 Global Banks by Market Capitalization in the fourth quarter \(Q4\) of 2024](#), with the New York, United States of America (USA) based **JPMorgan Chase & Co** remains as the **world's largest bank** by market capitalization (MCap) recording an increase of 37.2% to **USD 674.9 billion** by the end of Q4 of 2024 from Q4 of 2023.

- USA-based Bank of America Corporation (**BAC**) secured the **2nd position** with USD 337.2 billion, while China-based Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (**ICBC**) **ranked 3rd** with USD 328.2 billion.
- In Q4 2024, India's **HDFC bank** Limited dropped from 7th to **13th position** compared to Q4 2023, **ICICI bank** Limited moved up one spot to **19th** from 20th position, and State Bank of India (**SBI**) retained its **24th position**.

About GlobalData Plc:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Mike Danson

Headquarters – London, the United Kingdom (UK)

Founded – 1999

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- USA-based Bank of America Corporation (**BAC**) secured the **2nd position** with USD 337.2 billion, while China-based Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (**ICBC**) **ranked 3rd** with USD 328.2 billion.
- In Q4 2024, India's **HDFC bank** Limited dropped from 7th to **13th position** compared to Q4 2023, **ICICI bank** Limited moved up one spot to **19th** from 20th position, and State Bank of India (**SBI**) retained its **24th position**.

Top 5 Global Banks by MCap :

Rank	Bank	Country	Market Capitalization (USD/ Billion)
1	JPMorgan Chase & Co	New York, the USA	674.9
2	Bank of America Corporation(BAC)	North California, the USA	337.2
3	Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC)	Beijing, China	328.2
4	Agricultural Bank of China(ABC)	Beijing, China	251.1
5	Wells Fargo	California, the USA	235.0

Rank of Indian Banks:

Rank	Bank	Headquarters	Market Capitalization (USD/ Billion)
13	HDFC Bank Limited	Mumbai, Maharashtra	158.5
19	ICICI Bank Limited	Mumbai, Maharashtra	105.7
24	State Bank of India(SBI)	Mumbai, Maharashtra	82.9

Key Highlights:

- i.**The aggregate MCap of the top 25 global banks rose by **27.1%** year-on-year (YoY), reaching USD 4.6 trillion in Q4 ended December 31, 2024, compared to the same period in 2023.
- ii.**Indian banks showed resilience, with **ICICI Bank** leading with a **25.8%** rise in MCap to USD 105.7 billion, highlighting the growth of India's digital banking and credit ecosystem.
 - HDFC Bank's MCap grew by 1.6% to USD 158.5 billion, driven by rising competition and cost pressures.
- iii.**USA-based **Goldman Sachs** saw a remarkable 42.9% growth, climbing from 13th to 9th place in the rankings.
- iv.**China's top four banks-ICBC, Bank of China, ABC, and China Construction Bank, recorded annual market value growth of 30% to 40%.

About GlobalData Plc:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Mike Danson

Headquarters – London, the United Kingdom (UK)

Founded – 1999

Shriram Housing Finance Rebranded as Truhome Finance

In January 2025, Shriram Housing Finance Limited (**SHFL**), a housing finance company in India, has rebranded as **Truhome Finance**. The rebranding follows its acquisition by **Warburg Pincus** and co-investors, including Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), Qatar's sovereign wealth fund from Shriram Finance.

- i.**Shriram Finance Group received an investment of **Rs 1,225 crore**, increasing the Company's net worth to over Rs 3,300 crore.
- ii.**In December 2024, Shriram Finance sold its entire **84.44%** stake in its affordable housing finance subsidiary SHFL to Warburg Pincus for a sale consideration of Rs 3,929 crores.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

IMF Retains India's GDP growth forecast at 6.5% for FY26 & FY27

On January 19, 2025, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) maintained its growth forecast for India's economy at **6.5%** for both Financial Year 2025-26 (**FY26**) and **FY27**.

- The IMF's World Economic Outlook report stated that India's growth is expected to remain solid at **6.5%**, consistent with previous projections made in **October 2024**.

India's Economic Performance:

i. India's Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) growth slowdown in the 2nd quarter of Financial Year 2025 (**FY25**) to **5.4%**, lower than the **6.7%** recorded in the same period of the previous financial year 2024 (FY24). The slowdown is attributed to a sharp deceleration in industrial activity.

ii. In FY24, India's GDP growth was **8.4%**, indicating a significant slowdown compared to the previous year 2023.

Global Economic Outlook:

i. The IMF's global growth forecast remains at **3.3%** for both **2025** and **2026**, which is below the historical average of **3.7%**.

ii. The global economy faces risks such as protectionist policies, geopolitical tensions, and inflationary pressures, which could negatively impact trade and investment.

Key Risks:

i. The IMF warned of risks such as the intensification of protectionist policies, could lead to higher tariffs, disrupt global trade flows, and lower investment.

ii. Geopolitical tensions in regions like the Middle East and Ukraine could affect commodity prices, particularly in energy and food sectors.

About International Monetary Fund (IMF):

Managing Director (**MD**) – Kristalina Georgieva

Headquarters – Washington, D.C., the United States of America (USA)

Founded – 1944

Moody's Lowers India's Economic Growth Forecast to 7% for FY 2024-25

On January 20, 2025, Moody's Corporation revised India's economic growth forecast for the financial year 2024-25 (FY25), lowering it to 7%, down from 8.2% in the previous FY2024.

- The slowdown is partly due to **tight monetary policies** aimed at curbing inflation and global challenges, including geopolitical tensions and adverse weather conditions.

Key Points:

i.Economic Outlook: India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is projected to slow to 7% in FY25, down from 8.2% in FY24. While the growth rate is lower, it remains strong compared to global averages.

ii.Sector Contributions: Despite the slowdown, sectors such as **agriculture** and services continue to show positive growth. Agriculture grew by **3.5%**, and services expanded by **7.1%**. However, industrial growth remained weak at **3.6%** year-on-year.

iii.India's GDP per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity, increased by **11%** year-on-year, reaching **USD 10,233** in FY 2023.

Points to be noted

- The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (**FICCI**) also revised its growth forecast for FY25 down to **6.4%**, from **7%**.
- The Asian Development Bank (**ADB**) lowered its forecast to **6.5%** for FY2024. The ADB also revised its **FY2025-26** forecast to **7%** from **7.2%** due to tighter **monetary policies** impacting demand.
- Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) projected a growth rate of 7.2% for FY 2025, but due to changing economic conditions, it lowered the forecast to 6.6%.

CSE & NCDEX signs MoU for Commodities and Derivatives Trading

On January 20, 2025, Colombo Stock Exchange(**CSE**) of Sri Lanka and National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange(**NCDEX**) of India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) to enhance commodities and derivatives trading in Sri Lanka.

- The MoU aims to foster knowledge transfer between NCDEX and CSE, focusing on the development of trading systems, regulatory frameworks, and innovative product design benefiting traders and market participants in both countries.

As part of the agreement, NCDEX and CSE will:

i.Knowledge Transfer: Both exchanges will share technical expertise in product development, trading mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks.

ii.Technology and Infrastructure Support: Assistance will be provided in setting up advanced trading systems and operational infrastructure.

iii.Capacity Building: Joint training programs will be conducted to develop the skills of personnel in areas such as technology, trading systems, and regulations.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Gyanendra Pratap Singh Appointed as DG of CRPF

In January 2025, **Gyanendra Pratap Singh** was appointed Director General (**DG**) of the Central Reserve Police Force (**CRPF**), India's largest paramilitary force, with the approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC). He will serve as the CRPF chief until further orders or until his superannuation on November 30, 2027.

- He will take charge from Special DG of the CRPF **Vitul Kumar** who has been holding officiating charge of the force after the retirement of **Anish Dayal Singh** on December 31, 2024.

i. Senior IPS officer **Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal** has also been named as the Additional Director General (**ADG**) of the Border Security Force (**BSF**).

ii. **Shamsher Singh**, the current DG of the Gujarat Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), has been appointed as the **ADG of the BSF** for a tenure upto the 31st of March 2026.

About Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF):

Director General (**DG**) – Gyanendra Pratap Singh

Headquarters – New Delhi(Delhi)

Established – 1939

In January 2025, **Gyanendra Pratap Singh** was appointed Director General (**DG**) of the Central Reserve Police Force (**CRPF**), India's largest paramilitary force, with the approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC). He will serve as the CRPF chief until further orders or until his superannuation on November 30, 2027.

- He will take charge from Special DG of the CRPF **Vitul Kumar** who has been holding officiating charge of the force after the retirement of **Anish Dayal Singh** on December 31, 2024.
- Prior to this, he served as the DG of Police (DGP) of Assam.

About Gyanendra Pratap Singh:

i.Gyanendra Pratap Singh is a 1991-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre.

ii.He also worked with the Special Protection Group (**SPG**), which provides security to the Prime Minister.

iii.He has worked with the National Investigation Agency (**NIA**) for six years, and in several parts of the northeast for over 18 years.

iv.He also served as Director of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (**ACB**) of Assam and led the Rhino Protection Task Force constituted by the state government in 2021.

Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal named ADG of BSF

Senior IPS officer **Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal** has also been named as the Additional Director General (**ADG**) of the Border Security Force (**BSF**).

- He will hold the position for four years from the date he assumes charge or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- **Shamsher Singh**, the current DG of the Gujarat Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB), has been appointed as the **ADG of the BSF** for a tenure upto the 31st of March 2026.

About Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal:

i.Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal is a 1994-batch IPS officer from the Tamil Nadu (TN) cadre, currently serving as the Special DGP, Armed Police in TN.

ii.He headed the Operations, Enforcement Bureau and Armed Police units while serving as Commissioner of Police, Chennai, TN

iii.He is the recipient of the President Police Medal for Distinguished Service and Police Medal for Meritorious Service.

About Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF):

Director General (**DG**) – Gyanendra Pratap Singh

Headquarters – New Delhi(Delhi)

Established – 1939

Nidhi Khare Assumes Additional Charge as Secretary of MNRE

In January 2025, **Nidhi Khare**, Secretary of the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA), Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (MoCAF&PD), was given the additional charge as the **Secretary** of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (**MNRE**).

- The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved her assignment with immediate effect. She will hold the position until a regular incumbent is appointed or until further orders.
- She replaced **Prashant Kumar Singh** who was appointed as the Chief Secretary(CS) of Manipur.

i.Nidhi Khare, a 1992-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer from the Jharkhand cadre, brings over 3 decades of administrative experience. She held several prominent positions throughout her career.

ii. From 2015 to 2018, she served as the Special/Additional Secretary, DCA, MoCAF&PD.

iii. In Jharkhand, she served as the Secretary, Commercial Taxes from 2015 to 2016, and as the Principal Secretary, Personnel, Administrative Reforms and Rajbhasha from 2016 to 2018.

SPORTS

India Open 2025: Viktor Axelsen, An Se-Young secure men's and women's singles titles

Paris Olympic gold medalists **Viktor Axelsen** of Denmark and South Korea's **An Se Young** won the **Men's** and **Women's Singles** titles in the finals of **India Open Super 750 badminton tournament 2025** held on **19th January 2025** at the **KD Jadhav Indoor Hall** in **New Delhi**, Delhi.

- Axelsen defeated Hong Kong's **Lee Cheuk Yiu** in the Men's Singles final while An Se Young defeated Thailand's **Pornpawee Chochuwong** in the women's singles final.
- The India Open Super 750 badminton tournament 2025 was held from **14th January to 19th January** 2025.

Note:The total prize money for the India Open 2025 was **USD 950,000**.

Key Highlights:

i. Malaysia's **Goh Sze Fei** and **Nur Izzuddin** defeated South Korea's Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae in the **Men's doubles**

ii. In the **Women's doubles** category, Japan's **Arisa Igarashi** and **Ayako Sakuramoto** defeated South Korea's Kim Hye Jang and Kong Hee Young in the finals to win the title.

iii. China's **Jiang Zhenbang** and **Wei Yaxin** won in the **mixed doubles** category after defeating France's Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue in the finals.

About India Open:

i. The India Open, officially known as the **Yonex Sunrise India Open** is an annual badminton event which has been held in India since **2008**.

- It was held for the first time in **1973**.

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- Axelsen defeated Hong Kong's **Lee Cheuk Yiu** in the Men's Singles final while An Se Young defeated Thailand's **Pornpawee Chochuwong** in the women's singles final.
- This was Axelsen's **6th** India Open final in **10 years** and has won his **3rd** India Open men's singles **title** after winning it in **2017** and **2019**.
- The India Open Super 750 badminton tournament 2025 was held from **14th January to 19th January 2025**.

Note:

The total prize money for the India Open 2025 was **USD 950,000**.

- Out of the total, the men's and women's **singles** winners will be awarded with **USD 66,500** and the winners in the **men's, women's** and **mixed doubles** categories will be awarded **USD 70,300** respectively.

Key Highlights:

i.Malaysia's **Goh Sze Fei** and **Nur Izzuddin**defeated South Korea's Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae in the **Men's doubles**

ii.In the **Women's doubles** category, Japan's **Arisa Igarashi** and **Ayako Sakuramoto** defeated South Korea's Kim Hye jeong and Kong Hee Yong in the finals to win the title.

iii.China's **Jiang Zhenbang** and **Wei Yaxin** won in the **mixed doubles** category after defeating France's Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue in the finals.

Results:

Category	Winners
Men's singles	Viktor Axelsen (Denmark)
Women's singles	An Se-young (South Korea)
Men's doubles	Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin (Malaysia)
Women's doubles	Arisa Igarashi and Ayako Sakuramoto (Japan)
Mixed doubles	Jiang Zhen Bang and Wei Ya Xin (China)

About Viktor Axelsen:

i. Viktor Axelsen has won **gold** medals in men's singles at the **2020 Tokyo Olympics** and **2024 Paris Olympics** after his bronze medal in **2016 Rio Olympics**.

ii. He has also won the **World Championships** in **2017** and **2022**, becoming the only non-Asian male player besides Thomas Lund to win the title twice.

iii. On individual levels, he has won **3 European Championships** titles in 2016, 2018, and 2022, and a gold medal at the European Games in 2023.

About An Se Young:

i. An Se-young has won the **gold** medal at the **2024 Summer Olympics** in the women's singles event.

ii. She has also won the **gold** medal at the **2023 World Championships**, becoming the first Korean women's singles player to win the World Championships title.

iii. Besides, she has won **gold** medal in the women's singles at the **2022 Asian Games** and in women's team at the 2022 Uber Cup and at the 2022 Asian Games.

About India Open:

i. The India Open, officially known as the **Yonex Sunrise India Open 2025** is an annual badminton event which has been held in India since **2008**.

- It was held for the first time in **1973**.

ii. In **2018**, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) included it in its World Tour as a **Super 500 event** and later was upgraded to a **Super 750 tournament**.

Kho Kho World Cup 2025: India wins both men's and women's team events

The Indian men's and women's teams won the Kho Kho World Cup 2025 titles in their respective finals of the 1st edition of the **Kho Kho World Cup 2025** held from January 13 to 19, 2025 at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in **New Delhi**, Delhi.

- The Indian men's Kho Kho team beat Nepal by 54-36 while the women's team defeated the Nepalese team by 78-40 in the finals.
- The Indian men's team was captained by **Pratik Waikar** while the Women's team was captained by **Priyanka Ingle**.

Key Highlights:

i. India men's team remained unbeaten throughout the Kho Kho tournament.

- The team topped the Group A standings with four wins defeating **Sri Lanka** in the **quarter-finals** and **South Africa** in the **semi-finals**.

ii. The Indian women's Kho Kho team also remained undefeated in the tournament.

- They won their three Group A matches and then defeated **Bangladesh** and **South Africa** in the **quarter-finals** and **semi-finals**, respectively.

About Kho Kho World Cup 2025:

i. The Kho Kho World Cup 2025 tournament was organized by the Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI) and the International Kho Kho Federation (IKKF).

- This inaugural edition of the competition was backed by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), and featured 20 men's and 19 women's teams.

ii. The Indian men's team was in Group A with **Nepal, Peru, Brazil** and **Bhutan** while the women's team was in Group A with the **Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia** and **Republic of Korea**.

iii. Teams competed in a round-robin format, with the top performers advancing to the knockout rounds and finals.

Note: The second edition of Kho Kho World Cup will take place in Birmingham, England in 2026-27.

About Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI):

President – Sudhansu Mittal

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 1955.

Jannik Sinner and Iga Natalia Świątek Crowned ITF World Champions 2024

On January 21, 2025, the International Tennis Federation (**ITF**) announced **Jannik Sinner** (Italy) as 'Men's ITF World Champion 2024' and **Iga Natalia Świątek** (Poland) as 'Women's ITF World Champion 2024', for their exceptional performances across major tournaments, including Grand Slams tournaments, the Davis Cup, Billie Jean King Cup, the Olympic Games and other premier events.

- With this, Jannik Sinner became the **first Italian** player to receive this award.
- Iga Natalia Świątek was awarded the ITF honor for the **second** time, after 2022.

Winners of ITF World Champion Awards 2024:

Category	Player
Men's Singles Champion	Jannik Sinner (Italy)
Women's Singles Champion	Iga Natalia Świątek (Poland)
Men's Doubles Champions	Marcelo Arévalo González (El Salvador) & Mate Pavic (Croatia)
Women's Doubles Champions	Sara Errani & Jasmine Paolini (Italy)

About the International Tennis Federation (ITF):

President & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– David Haggerty

Headquarters- London, the United Kingdom (UK)

Established- 1913

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Men's Doubles Champions	Marcelo Arévalo González (El Salvador) & Mate Pavić (Croatia)
Women's Doubles Champions	Sara Errani & Jasmine Paolini (Italy)

About Jannik Sinner:

i. Jannik Sinner, the world number 1 in men's tennis, an Italian player secured his 1st Grand Slam title at the **Australian Open** 2024 followed by another triumph at the United States of America (USA) Open 2024.

ii. He capped off the year 2024 by winning the Association of Tennis Professionals (**ATP**) Finals, finishing the season with a 73-6 win-loss record.

iii. He also played a crucial role in leading Italy to their 2nd consecutive **Davis Cup** victory in Malaga, Spain.

About Iga Natalia Świątek:

i. Iga Natalia Świątek, a Polish tennis player, ranked **world number 1** in women's tennis, by winning her 4th French Open title, 4 Women Tennis Association (WTA) 1000 tournaments, and earning a Bronze medal at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

ii. She is the only player representing Poland to win a major singles title. She has won 5 major singles titles.

About Marcelo Arévalo González:

i. Marcelo Arévalo González, a Salvadoran tennis player, named Men's Doubles Champions 2024, marks his 1st ITF World Champion 2024 for earning multiple ATP titles in 2024.

ii. He has won 13 ATP Tour doubles titles, including two Grand Slam titles.

iii. In November 2024, he became the world No. 1 player in doubles jointly with his partner Mate Pavić.

About Mate Pavić:

i. Mate Pavić, a Croatian tennis player, named 'Men's Doubles Champions 2024' marks his 2nd ITF World Champion for winning multiple Grand Slam doubles titles in 2024, including Wimbledon Championships and the USA Open.

ii. He is a seven-time Grand Slam champion, having won four in men's doubles and three titles in mixed doubles, as of December 2024

iii. In 2018, he became the first Croatian to be ranked number one in the world in doubles.

About Jasmine Paolini & Sara Errani:

i. Jasmine Paolini and Sara Errani were named 'Women's Doubles Champions 2024' where the Italian duo made history by winning Italy's 1st Olympic tennis Gold at the Paris 2024 Games.

ii. They won 2 **WTA 1000 events** and played a key role in **Italy's 5th** Billie Jean King Cup win in Málaga, Spain.

About the International Tennis Federation (ITF):

President & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– David Haggerty

Headquarters– London, United Kingdom (UK)

Established– 1913

23rd JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

MoC&I: India becomes World's 7th Largest Coffee Producing Country; Exports Soar to USD 1.29 Billion in FY24

According to the Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoC&I), **India** became the world's **7th** largest **coffee producing** country with exports reaching **USD 1.29 billion** in Financial Year 2023-24 (FY24), from USD 719.42 million recorded in FY21.

- The Ministry further revealed that India exported over 9,300 tonnes of coffee in the 1st half of January 2025, with top buyers including Italy, Belgium and Russia.

ii. As per MoC&I, domestic consumption of coffee has increased from 84,000 tonnes (in 2012) to **91,000 tonnes (in 2023)**.

iii. India's coffee is primarily grown in the ecologically rich Western and Eastern Ghats.

Karnataka topped in terms of coffee production, contributing 2,48,020 Metric Tonnes (MT) in 2022-23, followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu (TN).

Note: Top 5 coffee producing countries: Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia, Indonesia, and Ethiopia.

About Coffee Board of India (CBoI):

Chairman- M.J. Dinesh

Headquarters -Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established- 1942

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- The Ministry further revealed that India exported over 9,300 tonnes of coffee in the 1st half of January 2025, with top buyers including Italy, Belgium and Russia.

Note: Top 5 coffee producing countries: Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia, Indonesia, and Ethiopia.

Key Points:

i. Nearly 3/4th (75%) of India's coffee production consists of Arabica and Robusta beans are exported as unroasted beans.

- However, there is a growing demand for value-added products like roasted and instant coffee, further boosting the export of coffee.

ii. As per MoC&I, domestic consumption of coffee has increased from 84,000 tonnes (in 2012) to **91,000 tonnes (in 2023)**.

iii. India's coffee is primarily grown in the ecologically rich Western and Eastern Ghats. **Karnataka** topped in terms of coffee production, contributing 2,48,020 Metric Tonnes (MT) in 2022-23, followed by Kerala and Tamil Nadu (TN).

Government Initiatives:

i. MoC&I through the Integrated Coffee Development Project (**ICDP**) aimed at improving yields, expanding cultivation in non-traditional regions and ensuring the sustainability of coffee farming.

ii. A prime example of the success of India's coffee industry is Araku Valley, where nearly 1.5 lakh tribal families in collaboration with the Coffee Board of India (CBoI) and the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) have increased coffee production by **20%**.

- This achievement is supported by loans from the Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC).

Key Facts about Coffee:

- Coffee plant originated in Ethiopia and spread to the Middle East before making its way to Europe in the 15th Century.
- Coffee is the world's 2nd most traded commodity after oil.
- International Coffee Day (ICD), is annually observed across the world on October 01.

About Coffee Board of India (CBoI):

It is a statutory body established under Section 4 of the Coffee Act, 1942. The Board has a Central Coffee Research Institute (CCRI) at Balehonnur, Karnataka with a sub-station at Chettalli, Karnataka.

Chairman- M.J. Dinesh

Headquarters -Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established- 1942

Seven Products from Andaman and Nicobar Islands Granted GI Tags

In December 2024, the Geographical Indications (GI) Registry in Chennai, Tamil Nadu (TN), under the Department of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I), **granted GI tags to seven indigenous and distinctive products** from the Andaman and Nicobar (**A&N**) Islands, recognizing their cultural and traditional importance.

- The seven products are: Nicobari Mat (Chatrai-hileuoi), Nicobari Hut (Chanvi Pati – Nyi hupul), Nicobari Hodi craft, Padauk Wood Craft, Nicobar Coconut, Nicobari Tavi-i-Ngaich (Virgin Coconut Oil) and Andaman Karen Musley Rice.
- This is the **first time** in the country that a single Union Territory (UT) has been granted GI tags for seven products in a single instance.

About Geographical Indications (GI) Registry:

Headquarters – Chennai, Tamil Nadu(TN)

Established – 2003

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- This is the **first time** in the country that a single Union Territory (UT) has been granted GI tags for seven products in a single instance.

Key Points:

i. This achievement was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the regional office of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (**NABARD**) in Vijayapuram (Andhra Pradesh, AP), along with various stakeholders.

ii. Several local organisations, including The Tribals Development Cooperative Society Limited, Sahara Women's Marketing Cooperative Society Ltd., Tribal Development Council, and the Centre for Participatory Training and Learning, contributed significantly to securing the GI tags.

iii. The initiative was coordinated by the Human Welfare Association (HWA) under the guidance of Padma awardee **Rajani Kant**, also known as "the GI Man of India."

7 New GI Products:

GI Product	Goods Type
Nicobari mat (Chatrai-hileuoi)	Handcrafts
Nicobari Hut (To Chanvi Pati-Nyi hupul)	
Nicobari Hodi craft	
Padauk furniture & craft	Furniture
Nicobari Tavi-i-Ngaich (virgin coconut oil)	Oil
Andaman Karen Musley rice	Crop
Andaman & Nicobar coconut	Plant

Overview of New GI Products:

i.Nicobari mat (Chatrai-hileuoi): The Nicobari mat is a significant cultural artefact made from sun-dried screw pine leaves. Used for sleeping, sitting, and during festivals.

- Nicobari mats are available only in the selected Andaman emporiums and markets.

ii.Nicobari Hut: These huts are made from locally sourced materials such as cane, sticks, and planks, with roofs crafted from cane leaves, grass, or other durable leaves.

- Its round, dome-shaped design offers stability, efficient airflow, and temperature regulation.

iii.Nicobari Hodi Craft: Hodi is a traditional outrigger canoe of the Nicobari tribe, used in the Nicobar Islands. Built using local trees or materials from nearby islands, the design of each hodi varies by island.

iv.Padauk Furniture & Craft : Padauk furniture is made locally in the Andamans using ornamental Padauk wood. It has a low carbon footprint as the wood waste is fully recyclable

v.Nicobari Tavi-i-Ngaich (virgin coconut oil) : Virgin coconut oil is a pure and natural product, indicating no chemical processing or oxidation. It is made from fresh coconut meat, coconut milk, or its residue, without any added chemicals.

vi.Andaman & Nicobar Coconut : Coconut plants grow in the coastal areas of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with the Nicobar Islands being a key source of coconut genetic diversity.

- The plant is crucial to the islands' ecology, economy, and cultural traditions.

vii.Andaman Karen Musley rice: Musley rice is a traditional food crop of the Andaman Islands, cultivated by the Karen community for generations. Over 50% of the rice fields in the islands still grow traditional varieties.

Note: As of December 2024, India has recorded 1,408 GI filings, of which 658 have been registered, positioning the country as a global leader in recognising and protecting unique products linked to specific geographies.

About Geographical Indications (GI) Registry:

Headquarters – Chennai, Tamil Nadu(TN)

Established – 2003

India's Rubber Board unveils 'iSNR' & 'INR Konnect' to Boost Rubber Production

In January 2025, the Kottayam (Kerala) based Rubber Board (**RB**) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I) unveiled two initiatives' **iSNR** (Indian Sustainable Natural Rubber)' and '**INR Konnect**' platform during the platinum jubilee celebrations of the **Rubber Act, 1947**, and the Rubber Growers' Conference held in Kottayam.

- These initiatives aim to strengthen India's global position in the rubber industry and increase domestic production.

i.The iSNR initiative aligns Indian rubber production with the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) standards.

ii.INR Konnect is a web-based platform designed to connect owners of untapped rubber plantations with adopters to enhance productivity.

About Rubber Board (RB) of India:

Executive Director (**ED**) – M. Vasanthagesan

Headquarters – Kottayam, Kerala

Founded – 1947

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- These initiatives aim to strengthen India's global position in the rubber industry and increase domestic production.
- Awards were also presented to the top performers of '**mRube**', the digital marketing platform for Natural Rubber (NR).

Note: The Rubber Act was enacted in 1947 to provide for the development under the control of the Union of the rubber industry. The Act has been amended several times to address the changing needs of the industry.

Key People: Union Minister of State (MoS) **George Kurian**, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying (MoFAH&D) and Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA); **M. Vasanthagesan IRS**, Executive Director(ED) of RB; and **T. Siju**, Rubber Production Commissioner in RB, along with several dignitaries, attended the inaugural session.

About iSNR (Indian Sustainable Natural Rubber):

- i.**The initiative aligns Indian rubber production with the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) standards.
- ii.**It includes iSNR traceability certification, ensuring the rubber's origin and confirming its compliance with EUDR requirements.
- iii.**It also provides stakeholders in the rubber supply chain with a pathway to access European Union (EU) markets.

About INR Konnect:

- i.**It is a web-based platform designed to connect owners of untapped rubber plantations with adopters to enhance productivity.
- ii.**It certifies the credibility of all parties involved while also providing training in production management and sustainable practices as needed.
- iii. Significance:** To address the 20-25% of untapped rubber plantations in India, which are affected by low prices, high production costs, and neglect from absentee landlords.

Rubber Production Status of India:

- i.**India is the **3rd largest** producer and 4th largest consumer of natural rubber (NR), and the 5th largest consumer of both natural and synthetic rubber worldwide.
 - **Thailand** is the world's largest producer of NR, followed by Indonesia.
- ii. Top producing states:** **Kerala** produces over 90% of India's NR, with additional production in states like Tamil Nadu (TN), Karnataka, Tripura, Assam, and Meghalaya.

About Rubber Board (RB) of India:

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DARPG Launched Scheme and Portal for PM's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2024

In January 20 2025, the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (**DARPG**), the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions (**MoPP&P**) officially launched the scheme and [web-portal](#) for the Prime Minister (PM)'s Awards for Excellence in Public Administration 2024.

- The registration on PM's Awards web portal has started from January 20, 2025. Submission of nominations will commence from January 27, 2025. The last date for submission of nomination is **February 14, 2025**.

i.The scheme for PM's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration for 2024, will recognize the contribution of civil servants under **3** categories through **16** awards.

ii.The award will comprise of a Trophy, Scroll and an incentive of **Rs 20 lakh** to the awarded district or organisation to be utilized for implementation of project/programme or bridging the gap of resources in any area of public welfare.

About Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions (MoPP&P):

Union Minister- PM Narendra Modi (Constituency- Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Minister of State (MoS)- Dr. Jitendra Singh (Constituency- Udhampur, Jammu & Kashmir, J&K)

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Background:

i.In 2006, the Government of India(GoI) has launched the scheme "Prime Minister's(PM's) Awards for Excellence in Public Administration" to acknowledge, recognize and reward the extraordinary and innovative work done by Districts/ Organizations of the Central and State Governments.

ii.The Scheme was restructured in 2014, 2020 and revamped with a new approach in 2021.

iii.The main objective of the scheme is to promote constructive competition, innovation, replication and institutionalization of best practices.

About PM's Awards for Excellence 2024:

The scheme for PM's Awards for Excellence in Public Administration for 2024, will recognize the contribution of civil servants under **3** categories through **16** awards. Name of these 3 categories and Awards are:

- **Category-1:** Holistic Development of Districts under 11 priority sector programmes (05 awards);
- **Category-2:** Aspirational Blocks Programme (05 awards);
- **Category-3:** Innovations for Central Ministries/Departments, States and Districts (06 awards).

i.For the year 2024, under the "Holistic Development" category, the award scheme recognizes the performance of the DC through targeted individual beneficiaries and implementation with saturation approach.

- The applications process for Awards will be evaluated on 3 main parameters such as: good governance, qualitative and quantitative.

ii.Districts with Aspirational Blocks, covering **500** Aspirational Blocks, across **329 districts** of India, will participate in the "Aspirational Blocks Programme" category.

- The period of consideration is 1st April, 2022 to 31st December, 2024,

iii.The winners will be selected through an evaluation process which includes 3 stages: Short-listing of districts/organisations by screening committee (1st and 2nd stage), evaluation by expert committee, and empowered committee.

- The recommendations of the empowered committee for Awards will be sent for the final approval of the PM.

iv.The award will comprise of a Trophy, Scroll and an incentive of **Rs 20 lakh** to the awarded district or organisation to be utilized for implementation of project/programme or bridging the gap of resources in any area of public welfare.

About Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions (MoPP&P):

Union Minister- PM Narendra Modi (Constituency- Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Minister of State (MoS)- Dr. Jitendra Singh (Constituency- Udhampur, Jammu & Kashmir, J&K)

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi Announces Updates to OMSS(D) Policy for 2024-25

Union Minister **Pralhad Joshi**, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution (MoCAF&PD) , has announced **updates** to the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic) [**OMSS(D)**] for 2024-25. These changes aim to enhance food security and streamline rice distribution across the country.

- The revised price **allows** State Governments, their corporations, and community kitchens to procure rice **without** undergoing electronic **(e)-auctions**.

i.The reserve price of **rice** is set at **Rs 2,250 per quintal** (applicable across India). This is a reduction from the earlier price of Rs 2,900 per quintal, which was set in August 2024.

ii.**Ethanol distilleries** can also purchase rice at the reduced reserve price of Rs.2,250 per quintal.

iii.This policy reflects the government's dedication to welfare initiatives, food security, and boosting ethanol production.

India & USA Sign MoU to Boost Cybercrime Investigation Cooperation

In January 2025, the Government of India (**GoI**) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of the United States of America (**USA**) to **enhance collaboration in cybercrime investigations**.

- The MoU was signed by Indian Ambassador **Vinay Kwatra** and Acting USA Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security, **Kristie Canegallo** in Washington DC, the USA.

i.This agreement **aims** to bolster India-USA security cooperation, addressing interconnected issues like terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, and other common security challenges linked to cybercrime.

ii.In India, the implementation of the agreement will be handled by the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (**I4C**) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

iii On the USA side, the Department of Homeland Security (**DHS**), along with its agencies like the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Homeland Security Investigations Cyber Crimes Center, (**C3**) will oversee the execution of the pact.

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI Introduced Revised Guidelines for ARC-Borrower Settlements

On January 20 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) introduced revised guidelines for the settlement of dues payable by borrowers to Asset Reconstruction Companies (**ARCs**) under the Master Direction- **Reserve Bank of India (Asset Reconstruction Companies) Directions, 2024**. These guidelines came into force with immediate effect.

- These revised guidelines were issued through a circular in exercise of powers given by Sections 9 and 12 of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security(**SARFAESI**) Act, 2002 (54 of 2002).
- These revised norms aimed to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in settlement processes carried out by ARCs.

i.For Borrowers with outstanding dues more than 1 crore: In this case, settlement of dues will be done only after the proposal is thoroughly examined by an Independent Advisory Committee (**IAC**), which shall comprise professionals with expertise in finance, law, or technical fields.

ii.For Borrowers with outstanding dues of Rs 1 crore or below: In this case, settlements can be approved by an official who was not part of the acquisition (as an individual or part of a committee).

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- These revised norms aimed to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in settlement processes carried out by ARCs.

Key Changes:

i.As per the new norms, it is mandatory for every ARC to frame a Board-approved policy for settlement of dues payable by the borrowers.

- These policies are required to cover important aspects such as: cut-off date for one-time settlement eligibility, permissible concessions based on exposure categories, and valuation methodologies for settling dues.
- The revised norms mandated that the ARC's Board of Directors should include a minimum two independent directors.

Criteria Settlement of Dues Based on Outstanding Amount:

i.For Borrowers with outstanding dues more than 1 crore: In this case, settlement of dues will be done only after the proposal is thoroughly examined by an Independent Advisory Committee (**IAC**), which shall comprise professionals with expertise in finance, law, or technical fields.

ii.For Borrowers with outstanding dues of Rs 1 crore or below: In this case, settlements can be approved by an official who was not part of the acquisition (as an individual or part of a committee).

- A quarterly report detailing trends and recovery timelines for these accounts must be submitted before the Board or Committee of the Board.

Other Key Points:

i.ARC has been mandated to constitute an IAC for examining the proposals related to change in or takeover of management of business of the borrower.

ii.The Committee is chaired by an independent director and has at least two independent directors, including the chair.

- Or, it should consist of minimum 1/3rd (33%) of the total strength of the board or 3 directors, whichever is higher.

About Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC):

i.It is a Financial Institution (FI) that buys Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) or bad loans from banks and FI and help them to recover from the NPAs.

ii.They are registered with RBI and are regulated under SARFAESI Act, 2002.

iii.The Net Owned Funds (NOFs) of ARCs should be Rs 100 crore or more and they are also require to maintain a capital adequacy ratio (CAR) of 15% of its risk-weighted assets.

iv.Some of the renowned ARCs in India are: Edelweiss Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (EARCL), National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL), among others.

RBI Sets Up MK Jain-Led Committee to Evaluate UB and SFB Applications

On January 20 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) formed a five-member Standing External Advisory Committee (**SEAC**) chaired by the former Deputy Governor of RBI, Mahesh Kumar (**MK**) **Jain** to evaluate the applications for Universal Banks (**UBs**) and Small Finance Banks (**SFBs**).

- The committee has a **three-year tenure**, supported by the Department of Regulation, RBI for secretarial assistance.

i.The other 4-members of the committee are **Revathy Iyer**, Director of Central Board of RBI; **Parvathy V Sundaram**, former Executive Director (ED) of RBI; **Hemant G Contractor**, former Managing Director (MD) of State Bank of India (SBI) and former Chairman of Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) and **NS Kannan**, former MD & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company Limited.

ii.Under the licensing guidelines, the RBI will first assess the eligibility of applications for UBs and SFBs. After that, the committee made up of experts in banking, finance, and related fields, will evaluate the applications.

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About Standing External Advisory Committee (SEAC) :

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Key Points:

i. Under the licensing guidelines, the RBI will first assess the eligibility of applications for UBs and SFBs. After that, the committee made up of experts in banking, finance, and related fields, will evaluate the applications.

ii. The committee will not review applications from SFBs which have already applied for or intend to apply for a UB license, as their eligibility was assessed when they were initially granted the SFB license.

iii. Applicants under review:

- For UB license – Annapurna Finance Private Limited (AFPL) and AU Small Finance Bank Limited (AU SFB).
- For SFB license – Fino Payments Bank and VFS Capital Limited.

iv. The first SEAC, formed in March 2021, was chaired by Shyamala Gopinath, former Deputy Governor of RBI, for a three-year term.

Eligibility Criteria for Conversion into SFBs:

i. Existing Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), Local Area Banks (LABs), and Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) owned by residents are eligible to apply for a license.

ii. The applicant must have a minimum of **Rs 100 crore** in paid-up capital

iii. The applicant must have a successful track record of at least 10 years

iv. The promoter must have at least 10 years of experience in the banking sector.

Eligibility Criteria for Conversion of SFBs into UBs:

- i. SFBs must have a minimum net worth of **Rs 1,000 crore**, as per the audited figures at the end of the previous quarter.
 - ii. Interested SFBs must have scheduled status and a satisfactory performance record for at least 5 years.
 - iii. It must meet the prescribed Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) requirement of 15% for SFBs.
- Note:** CRAR is a measure of a bank's capital relative to its risk-weighted assets.
- iv. Gross non-performing assets (G-NPA) and net NPA (N-NPA) must be less than or equal to 3% and 1%, respectively in the past two Financial Years (FYs)
 - v. The bank's shares should be listed on a recognized stock exchange.

Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel partner to launch digital financial services platform

In January 20 2025, **Bharti Airtel**, telecom services provider and **Bajaj Finance**, a private-sector Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC), have partnered to develop one of India's largest digital **platforms** for financial services to ensure faster last mile delivery.

- The platform will offer Bajaj Finance's diversified suite of **27** product lines to Airtel's 375 million customers.

i. Airtel will initially offer Bajaj Finance's retail financial products on its **Airtel Thanks Application (App)** for easy and safe customer experience, and thereafter through its nationwide network of stores.

ii. Two products of Bajaj Finance have been tested on the Airtel Thanks App and four products will be available to customers by March 2025.

- These include **Gold Loan, Business Loan**, a **co-branded Insta EMI** (Equated Monthly Instalment) Card and **Personal Loan**.

iii. Airtel-Bajaj Finserv EMI card users will be provided with flexible EMI options and payment plans for purchasing various goods and can be used for e-commerce transactions on multiple platforms.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

HSBC Hurun Global Indians List 2024: Microsoft's Satya Nadella topped

According to the **1st edition** of '**HSBC Hurun Global Indians List**', published by HSBC(Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation) and Hurun India, Microsoft's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) **Satya Nadella** has secured the top spot with a company valued at USD 3,146 billion.

- Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai (USD 2,107 billion) and YouTube CEO Neal Mohan (USD 455 billion) secured the 2nd and 3rd spots, respectively.

i.The combined value of the top 10 individuals is equal to 73% of the total combined value of the list. Notably, 5 companies in the list belong to the software and services sector.

ii.The list includes **12** women led by **Reshma Kewalramani** of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, followed by Jayshree Ullal of Arista Networks, and Leena Nair, the global CEO of Chanel, who are recognised as the most influential women of Indian origin.

According to the **1st edition** of '**HSBC Hurun Global Indians List**', published by HSBC(Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation) and Hurun India, Microsoft's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) **Satya Nadella** has secured the **top** spot with a company valued at **USD 3,146 billion**.

- Alphabet CEO **Sundar Pichai** (USD 2,107 billion) and YouTube CEO **Neal Mohan** (USD 455 billion) secured the **2nd** and **3rd** spots, respectively.
- The combined value of the top **10** individuals is equal to **73%** of the total combined value of the list. Notably, 5 companies in the list belong to the software and services sector.

About HSBC Hurun Global Indians List 2024:

i. HSBC Hurun Global Indians List 2024, ranking the 200 most valuable companies in the world led by Indian-origin leaders.

- The combined value of companies led by these leaders is estimated at **USD 10 trillion**.

ii. Companies were ranked according to their value, defined as market capitalisation for listed companies and valuations for non-listed companies.

- The cut-off date used was 29th November 2024.

iii. The list includes 226 CEOs, Managing Directors (MDs), and Founders and was created based on a survey of 400 respondents, including wealth creators featured in its lists.

Top 5 Indians on the list:

Rank	Name	Value of the Company (in USD)
1	Satya Nadella (Microsoft)	3,146 billion
2	Sundar Pichai (Alphabet)	2,107 billion
3	Neal Mohan (YouTube)	455 billion
4	Thomas Kurian (Google Cloud)	353 billion
5	Shantanu Narayen (Adobe)	231 billion

NRIs on the 2024 Hurun India Rich list:

i. According to the Hurun List, a total of **102** Non-Resident Indians (**NRI**s) is featured on the List.

- The report showed that 79% of the list's entrants were based in the United States of America (**USA**) followed by 5% in the United Kingdom (UK) and 4% in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

ii. In terms of preferred cities, **San Francisco** tops the list of (37) which has a cut-off of USD1 bn followed by New York and Palo Alto, California.

- Other major cities include London (8 entrants) while Dubai leads in the Middle East with 6 entrants in the list.

iii. **LN Mittal & family (Rs 1,84,500 crore)**, Chairman of Arcelor Mittal, tops NRIs in the HSBC Hurun Global Indians List 2024 followed by Gopichand Hinduja & Family (Hinduja Group) on the 2nd spot and Anil Agarwal & Family (Vedanta Resources) on the 3rd spot respectively.

Rank	Name	Value of the Company (in Rs)
1	LN Mittal & family (Arcelor Mittal)	1,84,500 Cr
2	Gopichand Hinduja & Family (Hinduja Group)	1,78,600 Cr
3	Anil Agarwal & Family (Vedanta Resources)	1,11,500 Cr
4	Jay Chaudhry (Zscaler)	1,02,700 Cr
5	Sri Prakash Lohia (Indorama)	74,200 Cr

Women on the 2024 Hurun India Rich list:

i. The list includes **12** women led by **Reshma Kewalramani** of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, followed by **Jayshree Ullal** of Arista Networks, and **Leena Nair**, the global CEO of Chanel, who are recognised as the most influential women of Indian origin.

ii. Women leaders such as Neha Narkhede (Co-Founder of Confluent), Anjali Sud (CEO of Tubi), and Yamini Rangan (CEO of HubSpot) are positioned in the list with their combined leadership overseas companies valued at over **USD 436 billion**.

Key Highlights:

i. Most of the Indian professionals in the list are in the **technology** sector, with most of them in the software and services industry (87 entries). Financial services and healthcare follow with 24 and 21 representatives, respectively.

- Around 93 companies led by Indian-origin leaders work in the areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

ii. According to the list, 62% of the leaders began their undergraduate studies in India and 77% did postgraduate degrees in the USA,

- **IIT Madras** emerged as the top undergraduate institute, having 14 leaders to the list.
- On the postgraduate side, Stanford University has topped with 20 leaders on the list.

iii. Around 57% of the leaders are first-generation entrepreneurs, 41% are professionals, and 2% are inheritors.

- Indian-origin entrepreneurs have founded 73 global unicorns.
- The youngest entrepreneur on the list is 27-year-old Tanay Tandon, co-founder of Commure.

iv. Most of the Indian-origin leaders come from regions such as Tamil Nadu (**TN**), **Punjab**, **Kerala**, and **Maharashtra** and based in global hubs including the USA, the UK, the UAE, and Singapore.

v. The average age of the individuals on the list is **56** years.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Donald Trump Sworn in as 47th President of the USA, JD Vance Takes Office as Vice President

On January 20, 2025, **Donald John Trump** took the oath of office as the **47th President** of the United States of America (USA) at Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C., USA. This marked the beginning of his **second term** in office. He **succeeded Joe Biden** after securing victory in the November 2024 election.

- **James David (JD) Vance** sworn in as the **50th Vice President** of the United States, succeeding Kamala Harris.

About Donald Trump:

Donald John Trump was born on June 14, 1946, in New York City, USA. In 2016, Trump won the presidential election in the United States and went on to serve as the 45th President from 2017 to 2021.

Policy Agenda for Second Term:

- i.**Key actions during President Trump's second term include **issuing** nearly 1,600 **pardons** for those involved in the 2021 USA Capitol riots, **withdrawing** the USA from the **Paris Climate Agreement** and the World Health Organization (**WHO**), and ending birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants and temporary visa holders.
- ii.**Additionally, he proposed a **100% tariff on goods** from BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) countries, which could significantly impact India, and a 25% tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico starting February 1.
- iii.**He also **declared a national emergency** at the southern border with Mexico and reversed 78 executive orders issued by former President Joe Biden.
- iv.**He imposed **travel bans on certain countries** and repealed several executive orders that supported diversity initiatives and aimed to promote **equality for** the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (**LGBTQ**) community.
- v.**On behalf of Government of India External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended Donald Trump's grand inauguration ceremony.

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

CCI Approvals on January 21 2025

On January 21 2025, the Competition Commission of India (**CCI**) has approved the following proposals:

- Acquisition of 100% shareholding of Gurugram (Haryana)-based Del Monte Foods Private Limited (**DMFPL**) by Gurugram based Agro Tech Foods Limited (**ATFL**), worth **Rs 1,300 crore**.
- Merger of 9 entities with pharmaceutical firm Sequent Scientific Limited (**SSL**).
- Acquisition of 100% shareholding of Cyprus-based investment holding company of Advent International Group, **AI Lenarco Midco Ltd.** by Singapore-based Majesty II Pte. Limited.

About Competition Commission of India(CCI):

It is a statutory body constituted under Competition Act, 2002.

Chairman- Ravneet Kaur

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2003

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- Merger of 9 entities with pharmaceutical firm Sequent Scientific Limited (**SSL**).
- Acquisition of 100% shareholding of Cyprus-based investment holding company of Advent International Group, **AI Lenarco Midco Ltd.** by Singapore-based Majesty II Pte. Limited.

CCI Approved Acquisition of Del Monte Foods by Agro Tech Foods for Rs 1,300 Crore

CCI has approved the proposed acquisition of 100% shareholding of Del Monte Foods Private Limited (**DMFPL**), primarily engaged in manufacture and sale of packaged foods by Agro Tech Foods Limited (**ATFL**), a publicly listed company engaged in the business of manufacturing, marketing and selling of broad range of food products and edible oils, worth **Rs 1,300 crore**.

- On the completion of this acquisition, DMFPL will become a wholly-owned subsidiary of ATFL.

Key Points:

i.As per the proposed combination, ATFL (Acquirer) will buy entire shareholding of DMFPL (Target) from its existing shareholders, i.e. Bharti Enterprises Limited (BEL), conglomerate mainly engaged in management consultancy services within the Bharti Group (including its subsidiaries) and DMPL India Limited (DMPL India).

ii.ATFL will issue **20.95%** and **14.39%** of its equity shares to Bharti and DMPL India, respectively through preferential allotment.

iii.Various entities of Bharti Group involved in this transaction, namely Bharti (SBM) Holdings Private Limited, Bharti (RBM) Holdings Private Limited, Bharti (RM) Holdings Private Limited, and Bharti (Satya) Trustee Private Limited (on behalf of Bharti (Satya) Family Trust) (Bharti Satya).

Points to Note:

i.Bharti Enterprises and the global investment group EL Rothschild established FieldFresh Foods as a 50:50 Joint Venture (JV) in 2004.

ii.In 2007, Singapore-based Del Monte Pacific Limited acquired 40.1% stake in FieldFresh Foods for USD 20.8 million.

iii.Later, FieldFresh was rebranded as DMFPL in 2021, which aimed at providing a 'sharper focus on branded processed foods and retail businesses'.

CCI Approved Merger of 9 Pharma Entities with Sequent Scientific Limited

CCI has approved the merger of 9 pharma entities with India-based Sequent Scientific Limited (SSL), a publicly listed company, which operates in the Animal Health market with a global footprint.

- This merger aimed to streamline operations and strengthen SSL's position in both animal and human healthcare segments.

Merger of Entities with SSL:

i. Mangalore (Karnataka)-based Sequent Research Limited (SRL), 100% subsidiary of SSL, which operates as a Contract Research Organisation providing analytical services and a wide range of testing to the international pharmaceutical industry.

ii. Hyderabad (Telangana)-based Viyash Life Sciences Private Limited (Viyash), pharmaceutical company and through its subsidiaries is mainly engaged in the development, manufacture and sale of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) and intermediates for human healthcare in India.

iii. Symbio Labs Limited (Symbio), Appcure Labs Private Limited (Appcure), Vindhya Pharma (India) Private Limited (Vindhya Pharma) and Vandana Life Sciences Private Limited (Vandana) are wholly owned subsidiaries of Viyash and S.V. Labs Private Limited (SV Labs) is a wholly owned step-down subsidiary of Viyash (through Vindhya Pharma).

- All these subsidiaries of Viyash are based in Telangana, Hyderabad.

iv. Telangana (Hyderabad)-based Genin Life Sciences Private Limited (Genin), a holding company and does not have any operations of its own.

- Vindhya Organics, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Genin, based in Telangana, Hyderabad. It is mainly engaged in the business of development, manufacture and marketing APIs for human healthcare.

CCI Approved Acquisition of AI Lenarco Midco & Convertible Debentures in Manjushree Technopack by Majesty II Pte Ltd

CCI has approved the proposed acquisition of 100% shareholding of the investment holding company of Advent International Group, **AI Lenarco Midco Ltd.** by Majesty II Pte. Ltd., a newly incorporated Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) and an investment holding company of the PAG group.

- This will result in indirect acquisition of the majority equity shareholding in Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based **Manjushree Technopack Limited**, which is engaged in the business of manufacturing and sale of rigid plastic packaging products in India.
- It has also approved the acquisition of certain compulsory convertible debentures in Manjushree Technopark from AI Lenarco by **Ashoka India Equity Investment Trust plc**, a close-ended investment company incorporated in England and Wales; Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based **Nuvama Private Investment Trust**, registered with Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) as a Category-II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) and InCred Growth Partners Fund-I (**IGPF-I**), is a scheme under InCred Alternative Opportunities Trust (IAOT) and is registered with SEBI as a Category-II AIF .

About Competition Commission of India(CCI):

It is a statutory body constituted under Competition Act, 2002.

Chairman- Ravneet Kaur

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2003

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

ISRO Successfully Demonstrated Restarting of Vikas Liquid Engine

In January 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka) based Indian Space Research Organisation (**ISRO**) successfully demonstrated the restart of its **Vikas liquid engine** at a test facility at the Propulsion Complex in Mahendragiri, Tamil Nadu (**TN**).

- The test marks a significant milestone in the development of stage recovery technologies, paving the way for reusability in future launch vehicles.

Key Points:

- i.**The Vikas engine is the reliable workhorse that drives the liquid stages of ISRO's launch vehicles.
- ii.**In this test, the engine was fired for 60 seconds, then shut off for 120 seconds before being restarted and fired again for 7 seconds.
- iii.**All engine parameters during the test were within normal limits and met expectations.
- iv.**Further tests are planned in the coming days to optimize the engine's performance under restart conditions.

V Narayanan Flags Off Core Liquid Stage of ISRO's LVM3 Launch

In January 2025, V Narayanan, Chairman of ISRO flagged off the core liquid stage (**L110**) of ISRO's Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (**LVM3**) launch vehicle to the launch complex at Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh (**AP**).

- The stage was designed and developed by the Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala) based Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (**LPSC**) as part of the development of the LVM3 launch vehicle.

Key Points:

- i.**It is designated for the LVM3 mission under a commercial agreement between Bengaluru (Karnataka) based NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) and United States of America (USA) based AST SpaceMobile & Science, Limited Liability Company (LLC) to launch their BlueBird Block 2 satellite.
- ii.**It is powered by twin Vikas engines, with a propellant loading capacity of **110 tonnes** (t).
- iii.**It is the tenth L110 liquid stage integrated at the ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri, TN.

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO):

Chairman – V. Narayanan

Headquarters – Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established – 1969

SPORTS

Vijay Hazare Trophy 2024-25: Karnataka defeats Vidarbha to win record 5th time

In January 2025, **Karnataka** secured their 5th title after defeating **Vidarbha** by 36 runs in the finals of 2024-25 edition of **Vijay Hazare Trophy(VHT)** held at the Kotambi Stadium in Vadodara, Gujarat.

- Karnataka was captained by Mayank Anurag Agarwal while Vidarbha was captained by Karun Kaladharan Nair.
- The 23rd edition of Vijay Hazare Trophy was held, from 21st December 2024 to 18th January 2025, with 38 teams competing in 135 matches.

Note: Karnataka has won their previous 4 titles in 2013-14, 2014-15, 2017-18 and 2019-20.

Key Highlights:

i.Smaran Ravichandran secured his **2nd** List A hundred that made Karnataka reach a total of **348** for 6 in the finals.

- Karnataka finished the group stage with just one loss in seven matches and then defeated Baroda and Haryana in the knockouts before finals with Vidarbha, which was their first final in over 5 years.

ii.Vidarbha captain **Karun Nair** was named **Player of the Tournament** for scoring 779 runs while India and Punjab pacer **Arshdeep Singh** topped the bowling charts with 20 wickets.

iii.Karnataka's **Smaran Ravichandran** claimed the Player of the Match award for his century in the final (101 runs in 92 balls).

iv.Karnataka received a prize money of **Rs 1 crore** and the runner-up Vidarbha was awarded with **Rs 50 lakh**.

About Vijay Hazare Trophy(VHT):

i.The VHT (officially known as the IDFC First Bank VHT), is the annual One day domestic tournament organised by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (**BCCI**).

ii.It is a domestic 50-over tournament which was established as a national tournament as the **Ranji One Day Trophy** in the 2002-03 season from its previous zonal format.

iii.The tournament was renamed as Vijay Hazare Trophy in the 2007-08 edition, named after Indian batsman Vijay Samuel Hazare.

iv.2023-24 edition of VHT was won by the Haryana men's cricket team.

OBITUARY

Dr. K. Ramchand, Founder & Director of CABS passed away

In January 2025, Wing Commander **Dr. K. Ramchand** (Retd), the founder and director of the Centre for Airborne Systems (**CABS**), under Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) lab in Bengaluru, Karnataka, passed away at the age of 82 in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

i. He led the team at the DRDO for the indigenous design and development of the Airborne Early Warning and Control (**AEW&C**) aircraft.

- The aircraft was inducted into the Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2017 and was used during the 2019 airstrike on Balakot (Pakistan), providing air cover to Mirage 2000 jets.

ii. He authored the book "***The Incredible Journey of the Indian Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)***", released at Aero India in 2019.

iii. During his over 20-year career in the IAF, he served as **IAF Communication Squadron** (COM Squadron) and flew several Very Important Persons (VIPs) as a crew member.

iv. The crew transported senior Indian Army officers during the surrender of the Indo-Pakistan war ending on December 16, 1971.

v. He is the recipient of the "**Distinguished Alumni Award**" from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc). And also received "**Scientist of the year award**" in 1985

IMPORTANT DAYS

UNESCO & WMO Declare 2025 as International Year of Glaciers' Preservation

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) have jointly declared **2025 as International Year of Glaciers' Preservation (IYGP)** on January 21, 2025, emphasizing the global urgency to safeguard glaciers, which are critical sources of freshwater for over **2 billion people worldwide**.

- This international year focuses to gain worldwide support, encourage research, and make cryosphere data more accessible, all with the goal of reducing the impacts of rapid glacier melting.
- The UN has designated March 21 as the International Day of Glaciers' Preservation or World Glacier Day. **The first World Glacier Day will be celebrated on March 21, 2025**, aligning with World Water Day, observed annually on March 22.
- An **International Conference on Glacier Preservation** will be held in **Dushanbe, Tajikistan** in May 2025.

Background

i. The International Year of Glaciers' Preservation 2025 (IYGP 2025) was established through resolution A/RES/77/158, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) during its 77th session in December 2022, with the leadership of UNESCO and the WMO.

About Earths Cryosphere

The cryosphere refers to all the frozen parts of the Earth, both on land and in the ocean. This includes snow, glaciers, ice sheets, ice shelves, icebergs, sea ice, lake and river ice, permafrost, seasonally frozen ground, and solid precipitation like snow.

About World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

Founded: 1950

Headquarters: Geneva, Switzerland

Parent Organization: United Nations (UN)

Secretary- General – Professor Celeste Saulo

On January 21 2025, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) and the World Meteorological Organization (**WMO**) have jointly declared **2025 as International Year of Glaciers' Preservation(IYGP)** in Geneva(Switzerland), emphasizing the global urgency to safeguard glaciers, which are critical sources of freshwater for over **2 billion people worldwide**.

- This international year focuses to gain worldwide support, encourage research, and make cryosphere data more accessible, all with the goal of reducing the impacts of rapid glacier melting.

Note : UN weather experts from the WMO confirmed that 2024 was the hottest year on record, at 1.55 degrees Celsius (C) above pre-industrial temperatures.

Background:

i.The International Year of Glaciers' Preservation 2025 (IYGP 2025) was established through resolution A/RES/77/158, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) during its 77th session in December 2022, with the leadership of UNESCO and the WMO.It was proposed by Republic of Tajikistan.

ii.As part of this initiative, **March 21st** has been officially designated as **International Day of Glaciers' Preservation** or World Glacier Day, starting from 2025.

iii.It will coordinate international efforts supported by over 75 international organizations and 35 countries.

iv.The International Year of Glaciers' Preservation (2025) and World Glacier Day (March 21) support Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 by addressing the critical role glaciers play in water resources.

Highlights of the Event

i. The UN has designated March 21 as the International Day of Glaciers' Preservation. The **first World Glacier Day will be celebrated on March 21, 2025**, aligning with World Water Day, observed annually on March 22.

- This annual observance aims to raise awareness about the significance of glaciers and the need for global collaboration to protect them.

ii. The UN has established a Trust Fund to support activities and initiatives focused on preserving glaciers.

- The resolution invites governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, major groups, other relevant stakeholders, and donors to voluntarily contribute to the trust fund in support of activities for glaciers' preservation.

iii. An **International Conference on Glacier Preservation** will be held in **Dushanbe, Tajikistan** in May 2025.

About World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS)

- **WGMS, at the University of Zurich in Switzerland**, collects data on glacier changes (mass, volume, area, length) and ice distribution. It is a service of IACS (International Association of Cryospheric Sciences), IUGG (International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics).
- It is a Part of World Data System (International Science Council) and works under UN Environment, UNESCO, and WMO.

About Earths Cryosphere

The cryosphere refers to all the frozen parts of the Earth, both on land and in the ocean. This includes snow, glaciers, ice sheets, ice shelves, icebergs, sea ice, lake and river ice, permafrost, seasonally frozen ground, and solid precipitation like snow.

i.The term comes from the **Greek word krios**, which means **cold**.

ii.More than 275,000 glaciers worldwide cover approximately 700,000 km². Glaciers and ice sheets store about 70% of the global freshwater.

iii.**70% of Earth's fresh water exists as snow or ice** and around 10% of Earth's land area is covered by glaciers or ice sheets.

iv.The **Hindu Kush Himalayan(HKH) cryosphere** is warming at twice the global average rate, according to the International Cryosphere Initiative.

Hindu Kush Himalayan cryosphere:-

- The Hindu Kush is an 800-kilometre(km)-long (500 mi) mountain range in Central and South Asia to the west of the Himalayas. It stretches from central and eastern Afghanistan into northwestern Pakistan and far southeastern Tajikistan.
- The HKH is located in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.

About World Meteorological Organization (WMO):

Secretary General – Professor Celeste Saulo

Founded –1950

Headquarters – Geneva, Switzerland

Parent Organization – United Nations (UN)

STATE NEWS

Chhattisgarh Launches 'Deendayal Upadhyay Bhoomiheen Krishi Majdoor Kalyana Yojana' for Landless Labourers

On January 20 2025, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister (CM) **Vishnu Deo Sai** launched the 'Deendayal Upadhyay Bhoomiheen Krishi Majdoor Kalyana Yojana' scheme in Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

- The scheme aims to provide financial support to landless agricultural labourer families, helping them to improve their net income and enhance their overall quality of life.

About Deendayal Upadhyay Bhoomiheen Krishi Majdoor Kalyana Yojana :

- i.The scheme was designed to provide financial assistance of **Rs 10,000** annually to landless agricultural labourers, Baigas, Gunias, and other landless families in the state.
- ii.The scheme benefits 5.62 lakh landless agricultural laborers across Chhattisgarh and a total of **Rs 562 crore** has been allocated to support these beneficiaries.
- iii.This initiative also includes forest produce collectors, shepherds, carpenters, blacksmiths, cobblers, barbers, washermen, and other landless families connected with the Pauni-Pasari system.
- iv.The scheme also extends to tribal temple worshippers like Pujari, Baiga, Gunia, and Majhi families in scheduled areas.

Key Points:

- i.Chhattisgarh Chief Minister (CM) Vishnu Deo Sai also participated in the '**Nagar Vikas Ke Sopan' program** in Raipur and laid the foundation stone of 813 works worth Rs 155.38 crore.
- ii.He also inaugurated 70 works worth Rs 15.25 crore in various urban bodies of the state, including the foundation stone of water supply schemes to be built at a cost of Rs 270 crore under Amrit Mission-2.0 in 6 urban bodies.

About Chhattisgarh:

Chief Minister (**CM**)– Vishnu Deo Sai

Governor- Ramen Deka

Capital- Raipur

Dams-Dudhawa Dam, Gangrel Dam & Sondur Dam

Gujarat CM inaugurates GIFT IFI and Innovation Hub in Gandhinagar

In January 2025, Gujarat Chief Minister (CM) **Bhupendra Patel** inaugurated the GIFT International Fintech Institute (**GIFT IFI**) and the GIFT International Fintech Innovation Hub (**GIFT IFIH**) at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

- Both the institutions are supported by the Asian Development Bank (**ADB**) and aim to develop the fintech sector.

i.GIFT IFI has been set up with collaboration of Ahmedabad University(Gujarat), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Gandhinagar(Gujarat), and the University of California, San Diego(the United States of America, USA)

- It will offer programs in areas like Fintech Foundations, Technology for Fintech, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) in Fintech.

ii.GIFT IFIH will provide support to fintech startups through an **incubator** and **accelerator programme** which will include mentorship, resources, and access to networks.

- Its first batch includes **10** startups from India, Singapore, the USA, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

24th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Cabinet Approvals on January 22 2025

On January 22 2025, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has approved the following proposals:

- i. Apprised of Achievements under National Health Mission (NHM) (2021-24). It has also approved continuation of the NHM for another 5 years.
- ii. Approved the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of **Rs 5,650 per quintal** for raw jute (TD-3 grade) for marketing season 2025-26. This marks an increase of nearly **6%** i.e. Rs 315 per quintal compared to last marketing season 2024-25.

Cabinet Apprised of Achievements under NHM (2021-24): A Milestone in Improving India's Public Health Outcomes

The Union Cabinet was apprised of the achievements under the National Health Mission (NHM) during a period of 3 years (from 2021-22 to 2023-24).

- It was also apprised of accelerated decrease in Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Infant Mortality (IMR), Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR), and Total Fertility Rate (TFR).

CCEA Approved Rs 5,650 per Quintal MSP for Raw Jute for 2025-26 Season

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by PM Narendra Modi approved the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of **Rs 5,650 per quintal** for raw jute (TD-3 grade) for marketing season 2025-26. This marks an increase of nearly **6%** i.e. Rs 315 per quintal compared to last marketing season 2024-25.

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- It was also apprised of accelerated decrease in Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Infant Mortality (IMR), Under-5 Mortality Rate (U5MR), and Total Fertility Rate (TFR).
- It has also approved continuation of the NHM for another 5 years.

Key Progress Made under NHM

i.NHM provided the engagement of **2.69 lakh** additional healthcare workers, in Financial Year 2021-22 (FY22). Also, **90,740** Community Health Officers (**CHOs**) were engaged.

ii.The NHM framework has also played an instrumental role in strengthening the public health system, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- NHM was crucial in administering **more than 220 crore** COVID-19 vaccine doses between January 2021 and March 2024.

iii.MMR has decreased significantly by **25%**, from 130 lakh live births (in 2014-16) to **97 per lakh(in 2018-20)**. It has decreased by 83% since 1990, which is higher than the global decline of 45%.

iv.U5MR has also declined from 45 per 1,000 live births (in 2014) to **32 (in 2020)**, which reflects a higher decline of 75% in the reduction of mortality when compared with the global reduction of 60% since 1990.

v.IMR has decreased from 39 per 1,000 live births (in 2014) to 28 (in 2020). Also, TFR declined from 2.3 (in 2015) to 2.0 (in 2020), as per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) .

- These improvements reflect that India is on track to meet its United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets for maternal, child, and infant mortality well ahead of 2030.

Key Progress in eliminating and controlling various diseases:

NHM has played an important role in the elimination and control of various diseases such as:

i.Under the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP), the incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) has decreased from 237 per 1 lakh population (in 2015) to 195 (in 2023), and similarly, the mortality rate has declined from 28 to 22 during the same period of time.

ii.The malaria cases and deaths have declined 13.28% and 3.22% respectively, in 2021 as compared to 2020.

- Malaria surveillance and cases have increased by 32.92% and 9.13% respectively in 2022, whereas malaria deaths have declined by 7.77% as compared to 2021.
- For the year 2023, malaria surveillance and cases have increased by 8.34% and 28.91% respectively as compared to 2022.

iii.Also, GoI's efforts to eliminate Kala-azar have been successful, with 100% of endemic blocks achieving the target of less than 1 case per 10,000 population by the end of 2023.

iv.The Measles-Rubella Elimination Campaign, under the Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI), has vaccinated more than 34.77 crore children, achieving a 97.98% coverage.

Progress Made by Key Initiatives launched under NHM:

i.Pradhan Mantri TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyan, launched in September 2022, has witnessed the registration of 1,56,572 Ni-kshay Mitra volunteers who have supported more than 9.40 lakh TB patients.

ii.Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme (PMNDP) has also been expanded, with more than 62.35 lakh hemodialysis sessions provided in FY24, which has benefitted over 4.53 lakh dialysis patients.

iii.In 2023, GoI launched the National Sickle Cell Anemia Elimination Mission, which has screened over 2.61 crore individuals in tribal areas, this progress will help in achieving the target of eliminating sickle cell disease by 2047.

iv.U-WIN platform launched in January 2023, aimed to ensure the timely administration of vaccines to pregnant women, infants, and children across India.

- The platform had expanded to 65 districts across 36 states/Union Territories (UTs) by the end of FY24, ensuring real-time vaccination tracking and improving immunization coverage.

Other Key Points:

i.The NHM has also emphasized on strengthening healthcare infrastructure, including the certification of public health facilities under the National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS).

- As of March 2024, 7,998 public health facilities have been certified, with more than 4,200 of them receiving national certification.

ii.Also, the number of operational Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM) centers, which offer a range of health services, has increased to 1,72,148 by the end of FY24, with 1,34,650 of these centers providing 12 key healthcare services.

iii.By March 2024, 12,348 Primary Health Centers (PHCs) had been converted to 24x7 services, and 3,133 First Referral Units (FRUs) were operational across the country.

- Additionally, the fleet of Mobile Medical Units (MMUs) has expanded, with 1,424 MMUs now operating to ensure healthcare access in remote and underserved areas.

Background:

i.In 2005, GoI launched the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) with the objective of building public health systems to provide accessible, affordable and quality healthcare to the rural population.

ii.The National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) was conceptualized in 2012 and the NRHM was later rebranded as the NHM with two sub-missions i.e. NRHM and the NUHM.

iii.In 2018, the Union Cabinet approved the continuation of NHM, with effect from 1st April, 2017 to 31st March, 2020.

- Later, in 2022, Department of Expenditure (DoE), Ministry of Finance (MoF) has further accorded the approval for continuation of NHM from 1st April, 2021 to 31st March, 2026.

iv.The implementation strategy of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW) under NHM is to facilitate financial and technical support to States/ Union Territories (UTs) enabling them to offer accessible, affordable, accountable and effective healthcare up to District Hospitals (DHs), especially to the poor and vulnerable sections of the population.

CCEA Approved Rs 5,650 per Quintal MSP for Raw Jute for 2025-26 Season

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (**CCEA**), chaired by PM Narendra Modi approved the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of **Rs 5,650 per quintal** for raw jute (TD-3 grade) for marketing season 2025-26. This marks an increase of nearly **6%** i.e. Rs 315 per quintal compared to last marketing season 2024-25.

- This increase in MSP for raw jute would ensure a return of 66.8% over the all India weighted average cost of production.

Key Points:

i. Also, this new approved MSP for raw jute is in line with the principle of fixing MSP at a level of minimum **1.5 times** all India weighted average cost of production as announced by the Government of India (GoI) in the Union Budget for FY19 (2018-19).

ii. The GoI has increased MSP of raw jute by **2.35 times** (Rs 3,250 per quintal), from Rs 2,400 per quintal (in 2014-15 season) to Rs 5,650 per quintal (2024-25 season).

iii. The Government revealed that the MSP amount paid to jute growing farmers during the period 2014-15 to 2024-25 was **Rs 1,300** crore compared to Rs 441 crore paid to jute growing farmers during the period 2004-05 to 2013-14.

Note: Kolkata (West Bengal, WB)-based Jute Corporation of India (JCI) will continue to act as nodal agency to undertake Price Support Operations and the losses incurred, if any in such operations, will be completely reimbursed by the GoI.

DoC Introduces 'DIA Scheme' to Enhance Global Competitiveness of Diamond Sector

In January 2025, the Department of Commerce (DoC), Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I), introduced the Diamond Imprest Authorization (**DIA**) Scheme.

- This scheme aims to enhance the global competitiveness of India's diamond sector and will be implemented with effect from **1 April 2025**.

About DIA Scheme:

i. This scheme offers the duty-free importation of Natural Cut and Polished Diamonds weighing less than ¼ carat (**25 cents**), encouraging value addition and increasing exports.

ii. This scheme requires exports to have a **10%** value added.

iii. All diamond exporters with **USD 15 million** in annual exports and Two Star Export House status or higher are eligible to receive benefits under this program.

iv. Validity of Diamond Imprest Licence (DIL) will be 1 year for import and 18 months for export.

- The DIL will be for a value of 5% of the average of past 3 years export. Maximum value of DIL for an exporter in one year will be USD 15 million.

v. Diamonds to be imported under Actual User Condition. Import and Export of Diamonds will be from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai (Maharashtra) only.

vi. The scheme is intended to create a fair playing field for Indian diamond exporters, particularly Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) exporters, allowing them to compete effectively with larger competitors.

Note: The Gems and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (**GJEPC**) reports that India's gross gem and jewelry exports in December 2024 totaled **USD 1,967.98 million** (Rs. 16719.460 crores), a 10.29% decrease from the same period in 2024.

MoA&FW Conducts India's First Edible Oil Consumption Survey

On January 9, 2025, the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (**MoA&FW**) launched the **first-ever** survey on the "My Gov" portal to assess edible oil consumption patterns across India.

- This initiative aims to support the effective implementation of the National Mission on Edible Oils-Oilseeds (**NMEO-Oilseeds**).
- It addresses the absence of recent data on consumption patterns in India, the world's largest consumer and importer of edible oils.
- The **45-day** questionnaire-based survey, launched on January 9, 2025, is scheduled to run until February 23, 2025.

i. Industry reports show that per capita annual consumption (PCAC) of edible oil in India has surpassed 20 Kilogram (kg), well above the recommended limits of 12 kg by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and 13 kg by the World Health Organization (WHO).

About Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW):

Union Minister– Shivraj Singh Chouhan (Constituency- Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, MP)
Minister of State(MoS) – Ram Nath Thakur (Rajya Sabha- Bihar)

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About India's First Edible Oil Consumption Survey:

- i.**The survey aims to analyze households' consumption patterns, choices, and preferences for edible oils, providing valuable insights to guide policy decisions.
- ii.**It collects demographic details like domicile and residence type and examines oil usage patterns, including types of oils, deep-frying frequency, seasonal variation in oil usage, and factors influencing oil choices like health benefits and cost.
- iii.**It evaluates public awareness of health risks like trans fats, opinions on oil reuse, and concerns about oils in packaged foods.
- iv.**It also aims to understand consumer behavior regarding advertisements, label reading, and their willingness to pay for healthier oil options.
- v.**The survey results will guide the identification of priority oilseeds under the NMEO-Oilseeds program, set to launch in the upcoming kharif (summer) season starting in July 2025.

Significance of the survey:

- i.**Industry reports show that per capita annual consumption (PCAC) of edible oil in India has surpassed 20 Kilogram (kg), well above the recommended limits of 12 kg by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and 13 kg by the World Health Organization (WHO).
 - This represents a significant rise from 2.9 kg in 1950-60, driven by factors like increasing incomes, urbanization, and shifting dietary habits.

About India's import of edible oils:

- i.**Currently, India imports **55-60%** of its edible oil needs from countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Argentina, Brazil, Russia, and Ukraine.
 - In the 2023-24 oil marketing year, India's edible oil imports totaled around **15.96 million tonnes (MT)**.
- ii.**According to the Solvent Extractors' Association (**SEA**) of India, the import of edible oils (excluding non-edible oils for industrial use) during the 2023-24 oil year (November-October) decreased by 3% to 15.96 MT, valued at Rs.1,31,967 crore (or USD15.9 billion), compared to the previous year.
 - The SEA has projected that imports may decrease by around 1 MT to 15 MT during the 2024-25 oil year.

About National Mission on Edible Oils-Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds):

i.The National Mission on Edible Oils – Oilseeds (NMEO-Oilseeds) is a focused initiative aimed at increasing oilseed production and achieving self-reliance in India.

- It was launched by Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (**DA&FW**) under MoA&FW in October 2024.

ii.It aims to increase the production of key oilseed crops like Rapeseed-Mustard, Groundnut, Soybean, Sunflower, and Sesamum, while improving collection and extraction from secondary sources like Cottonseed, Rice Bran, and Tree Borne Oils.

- The Seed Authentication, Traceability & Holistic Inventory (**SATHI**) Portal enables states to coordinate with stakeholders, ensuring the timely availability of quality seeds.

iii.The implementation period for NMEO-Oilseeds is **seven years**, from 2024-25 to 2030-31, with a financial outlay of **Rs. 10,103 crores**.

iv.It also aims to increase primary oilseed production from 39 MT (2022-23) to **69.7 MT** by 2030-31.

About Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW):

Union Minister– Shivraj Singh Chouhan (Constituency- Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, MP)
Minister of State(MoS) – Ram Nath Thakur (Rajya Sabha- Bihar)

India & France strengthens maritime security cooperation in IOR

In January 2025, **India** and **France** strengthened their **maritime security** cooperation to maintain peace and security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) during the **7th India-France maritime cooperation dialogue** held in New Delhi, Delhi.

- The dialogue was co-chaired by **Pavan Kapoor**, Deputy National Security Adviser(NSA), Government of India(GoI) and **Alice Rufo**, Director General(DG) for international relations and strategy, Ministry for the Armed Forces, France.

Note: India assuming chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in **2025** for two years.

Key Points:

- i. During the dialogue, India and France agreed to develop an analysis of **threats** to maritime security in the IOR to prevent illegal maritime activity, including piracy and armed robbery, maritime terrorism, contraband smuggling, unethical unreported and excessive fishing.
- ii. Both countries will also provide free and secure access to sea lanes of communications through association of their maritime assets and organisations.

- These organizations include the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region in Gurugram, the Regional Coordination Operations Centre in Seychelles, and the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar.

India, France expands partnership in high-end technology sectors

In January 2025, India and France agreed to deepen their bilateral **partnership in high-end technologies**, during the India-France Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) held in Paris, France.

- The consultations were co-chaired by **Vikram Misri**, Foreign Secretary of India and **Anne-Marie Descôtes**, Secretary-General of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.
- They also co-chaired a meeting of the India-France Special Task Force on Civil Nuclear Energy.

ii. Both the countries discussed to cooperate in various areas including defence, civil nuclear energy, space, cybersecurity, digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI), institutional dialogue mechanisms and initiatives to enhance people-to-people exchanges and cultural ties.

- The two countries also reviewed progress on the **India-France 'Horizon 2047 roadmap'**.
- Discussions were also held on climate change and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific as well as joint development projects in third countries.

About France:

President– Emmanuel Macron

Prime Minister(**PM**) – François Bayrou

Capital– Paris

Currency– Euro(EUR)

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Brand Finance Global 500 2025: Apple Tops Global Rankings; TATA Most Valuable Indian Brand

According to the **19th Global 500 2025 report** published by **Brand Finance**, **Apple** has retained its position as the world's most **valuable** brand, with a brand value of USD 574.5 billion (bn). **Tata Group** (USD 28.6 bn) is the most valuable **Indian** brand for the 15th consecutive holding **60th** spot in the list.

- In Global rank, Apple is followed by **Microsoft** (USD 461.1 bn) on the **2nd**, and **Google** (USD 413 bn) on **3rd** respectively.
- **WeChat** (95.2) has been ranked as the world's **strongest** brand for the 2nd consecutive year followed by **Nike** (94.7) on the **2nd** spot and **Google** (94.3) on the **3rd** position.
- **United States of America (USA)** has the greatest number of brands (193) in the list followed by China and Germany on the 2nd and 3rd place, with 69 and 27 brands respectively. **India got 8th place** in the list with the number of brands 15.
- **HCL Technologies** (HCLTech) has emerged as world's **fastest**-growing IT services brand in 2025, while **Infosys** has achieved the highest compound annual growth rate among IT services brands over the past 5 years (at 18.2%).
- The **'e&'**, telecommunications brand has become the **fastest**-growing brand in the world in 2025 with an eight-fold increase in brand value to USD 15.3 billion.
- According to the Brand Finance Global 500 2025 report, the top five Indian brands are Tata Group, Infosys, HDFC Group, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), and Reliance Group.

Top 5 Globally Valuable Brands:

Rank	Brand	Country	Valuation (in billion)
1	Apple	United States of America (USA)	USD 574.5
2	Microsoft	USA	USD 461.1
3	Google	USA	USD 413.0
4	Amazon	USA	USD 356.4
5	Walmart	USA	USD 137.2

Top 5 Valuable Indian Brands:

Rank	Brand	Valuation (in billion)
60	Tata Group	USD 28.6
132	Infosys	USD 16.3
164	HDFC Group	USD 14.2
177	Life Insurance Corporation	USD 13.3
237	Reliance Group	USD 9.8

Top 3 Global IT Brands:

Rank	Brand	Valuation (in billion)
1	Accenture,Ireland	USD 41.5
2	Tata Consultancy Services (TCS),India	USD 21.3
3	Infosys,India	USD 16.3

About Brand Finance Global 500 report:

- i.It is the annual study held every year since **2007** that provides information about the world's top 500 most valuable and strongest global brands.
- ii.It operates in over 25 countries and conducts more than **6,000** brand valuations and publishes over **100** reports which rank brands across all sectors and countries.

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- In Global rank, Apple is followed by **Microsoft** (USD 461.1 bn) on the **2nd**, and **Google** (USD 413 bn) on **3rd** respectively.
- Except for 2023, Apple has held the top spot as the world's most valuable brand since **2021**.
- **WeChat** (95.2) has been ranked as the world's **strongest** brand for the 2nd consecutive year followed by **Nike** (94.7) on the **2nd** spot and **Google** (94.3) on the **3rd** position.

Note:The 19th Brand Finance's Global 500 2025 report was, launched during a session held in the UAE pavilion at **Davos 2025** held in Switzerland.

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Highlights of Top 5 Valuable Indian Brands:

According to the Brand Finance Global 500 2025 report, the top five Indian brands are Tata Group, Infosys, HDFC Group, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), and Reliance Group.

- **LIC** emerged as the **fastest**-growing Indian brand with a brand value of USD 13.3 bn.
- **HDFC Group, SBI Group, and ICICI Group** have made significant entries into the global brand rankings this year, marking a notable achievement for India's banking sector.
- Other Indian brands in the list are- State Bank of India (SBI) (241), HCL Tech (262), Airtel (306), Larson & Toubro (L&T) (316), Mahindra (330), Wipro (358), Jio Group (366), ICICI Bank (375), Bajaj Group (409) and Indian Oil (446).

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60	Tata Group	USD 28.6
132	Infosys	USD 16.3
164	HDFC Group	USD 14.2
177	Life Insurance Corporation	USD 13.3
237	Reliance Group	USD 9.8

Key Highlights of the Report:

According to the report, the world's 500 most global brands grew 10% in value to USD 9.5-trillion, exceeding global economic growth of 3%.

- This year the brands that have experienced the biggest growth since 2020 with **TikTok** at the top (79%) and **DraftKings** and **FanDuel** on the 2nd and 3rd place respectively.
- **Walmart** is the **fastest** growing brand among the top 5 valuable companies in 2025. **Four** out of the five most valuable global brands are in the technology sector.
- **NVIDIA** (9th spot) achieved a 98% growth rate and secured a place in the top 10 for the first time since its initial valuation in 2014.
- The **'e&'**, telecommunications brand has become the **fastest**-growing brand in the world in 2025 with an eight-fold increase in brand value to USD 15.3 billion.

Brand Value by Country

- **United States of America (USA)** has the greatest number of brands (193) in the list followed by China and Germany on the 2nd and 3rd place, with 69 and 27 brands respectively.
- India got 8th place in the list with the number of brands 15.

Brand Value by Industry

- The **banking** sector has the greatest number of brands on the list (**78**) followed by retail (45) on 2nd and media on 3rd (24).

Top IT services brands of 2025:

i.India has secured the **2nd** position, contributing 36% of the total brand value while the **US**, holds the **top** position in Information Technology (IT) services brand value, holding 40% of the total brand value. The collective brand value of the top 25 IT Services brands stands at USD 163 billion in 2025.

- **Accenture** has secured the **1st** spot (USD 41.5 billion), for the 7th consecutive time.
- **Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)** (USD 21.3 bn) has become the **first** IT company in India and the **2nd** globally to cross the **USD 20 billion** in brand valuation.
- **Infosys** (USD 16.3 billion) has secured the **3rd** spot in the most valuable IT services brands for the 4th consecutive year.

ii.HCL Technologies (HCLTech) has emerged as world's **fastest**-growing IT services brand in 2025, while **Infosys** has achieved the highest compound annual growth rate among IT services brands over the past 5 years (at 18.2%).

iii.Other Indian companies on the list included **Wipro** (9th spot) and **Tech Mahindra**.

Top 3 Global IT Brands:

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Brand Strength Index (BSI):

i.It is a framework that aims to consider the position of a potential licensee or the acquirer of the brand by looking into the Marketing Investment, Stakeholder Equity, and the impact of those on Business Performance.

ii.The Brand Strength Index (BSI) assigns each brand a score out of 100, reflecting its overall strength. This score contributes to determining the brand's value. Based on their BSI scores, brands receive ratings similar to credit ratings, ranging up to AAA+.

About Brand Finance Global 500 report:

i.It is the annual study held every year since **2007** that provides information about the world's top 500 most valuable and strongest global brands.

ii.It operates in over 25 countries and conducts more than **6,000** brand valuations and publishes over **100** reports which rank brands across all sectors and countries.

WMF's 2025 Watch List Added Moon to List of Threatened Cultural Sites for the 1st Time; 2 Indian Sites on the List

In January 2025, New York (the United States of America, USA)-based World Monuments Fund (WMF), a non-profit organisation released its "[2025 World Monuments Watch List](#)". The list includes **25** endangered cultural heritage sites spanning 29 countries across 5 continents.

- This year list has gone beyond the usual landmarks such as temples, cemeteries and has added **Moon** on the list for the 1st time.

i.Other than Moon, the list features notable endangered cultural sites like: Erdene Zuu Buddhist Monastery (Mongolia), Noto Peninsula Heritage Sites (Japan), Ruins of Old Belchite (Spain), among others.

ii.The list features two Indian sites namely, Bhuj Historic Water Systems (Gujarat) and Musi River Historic Buildings (Telangana).

About World Monuments Fund (WMF):

President and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Bénédicte de Montlaur

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Established- 1965

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- Other than Moon, the list features notable endangered cultural sites like: Erdene Zuu Buddhist Monastery (Mongolia), Noto Peninsula Heritage Sites (Japan), Ruins of Old Belchite (Spain), among others.
- The list features two Indian sites namely, **Bhuj Historic Water Systems** (Gujarat) and **Musi River Historic Buildings** (Telangana).

About World Monuments Watch:

i.The World Monuments Watch List was launched in 1996. The list is released every two years (biennial).

- It includes sites, which face threats from climate change, conflict, natural disasters, among others, are nominated by individuals and community-based organisations that span the globe.

ii.Till date, WMF has issued a call to action for nearly 900 sites through the World Monuments Watch.

iii.So far, WMF has contributed over **USD 120 million** toward projects at nearly 350 Watch sites. The list is helping communities leverage an additional USD 300 million from other sources.

Key Concerns related to Moon:

i.A division of the Paris (France)-based International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)dedicated to aerospace heritage nominated the Moon for WMF's watch list.

- The inclusion of Moon on the list reflects the increasing human activity in space and the potential risks posed to its historical landmarks.

ii.The organisation has warned that over 90 important sites on the Moon could be harmed in the coming years.

iii.The report highlighted that Tranquility Base, the landing site of Apollo11 where astronaut Neil Armstrong 1st stepped on the lunar surface on July 20, 1969, could be at the most risk due to rising exploration missions to the Moon.

iv.The report noted that since 2020, the USA and 51 other countries (including India) have signed the Artemis Accords, a non-binding agreement which aimed to preserve space heritage including robotic landing sites, artifacts, spacecraft and other evidence of activity on celestial bodies.

Indian Sites on WMF's 2025 Watch List:

i. Bhuj Historic Water Systems: It is located in Kutch district of Gujarat, includes iconic Hamirsar Lake. It was nominated by the Center for Heritage Conservation (CHC) of CEPT Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) at CEPT University in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

ii. Musi River Historic Buildings: The historic buildings along the Musi river bank is located in Hyderabad, Telangana. It includes famous landmarks like the High Court(HC), State Central Library, Osmania General Hospital (OGH), City College (now a women's university).

- Musi river, originating from the Anantagiri hills, is a key tributary of Krishna river which flows through Telangana and divides Hyderabad into its old and new parts.

About World Monuments Fund (WMF):

President and Chief Executive Officer **(CEO)**- Bénédicte de Montlaur

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Established- 1965

India Officially Joins Eurodrone Programme as Observer State

In January 2025, **India** has officially joined the Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (MALE RPAS) or **Eurodrone programme** as the **Observer** State. With this, India became the second Asia-Pacific country after Japan to gain observer status.

i. The letter of approval (**LoA**) was handed over by Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation's (Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement, OCCAR) executive administration director, **Joachim Sucker**, to **Ajit Gupte**, India's ambassador to Germany in Berlin, Germany.

ii. Now India is granted access to technical data and the ability to place orders for the aircraft, they are not involved in the decision-making processes regarding the platform's design, development, or the distribution of workshare among the participating countries.

About Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement(OCCAR):

The Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation is an intergovernmental organization in Europe that manages and facilitates collaborative armament programs.

Director – Joachim Sucker

Headquarters – Bonn, Germany

Established – 1996

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- India made a formal request to become part of this programme in **August 2024**, and the approval was granted in January 2025.

Key Points:

i. Now India is granted access to technical data and the ability to place orders for the aircraft, they are not involved in the decision-making processes regarding the platform's design, development, or the distribution of workshare among the participating countries.

ii. This collaboration is expected to enhance India's defence relationship with Europe, supporting other ongoing initiatives such as the C-295 aircraft, which is being manufactured in India.

About Eurodrone Programme:

i.The Eurodrone project is a collaborative initiative involving four nations: **Germany, France, Italy, and Spain.** It was launched in 2016, is valued at an estimated Euro 7 billion (USD 7.3 billion).

ii.This programme is managed by the OCCAR based in Bonn(Germany) and led by Taufkirchen(Germany) based Airbus Defence and Space, includes Leonardo (Italy), Dassault Aviation SA (France), and Airbus (Spain) as major subcontractors.

iii.The Eurodrone is a Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) designed for **long-endurance missions**, including surveillance, reconnaissance, maritime monitoring, and anti-submarine warfare.

- Designed to work in all weather conditions, it is equipped with a twin-engine setup.

iv.The system passed its Preliminary Design Review (**PDR**) in 2024 and is expected to be operational by 2030. It is capable of carrying up to 2.3 tonnes of payload and can stay in the air for up to 40 hours.

v.The **first flight** of the Eurodrone is scheduled for 2026, with initial deliveries expected by 2028.

Note: Currently, the Indian Air Force(IAF) operates only 31 squadrons, far below the approved strength of 42, marking the lowest number of squadrons since 1965.

About Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en matière d'Armement(OCCAR):

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Director – Joachim Sucker

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BANKING & FINANCE

Skydo Receives In-Principle Approval from RBI as Payment Aggregator for Cross-Border Payments

On 21 January 2025, **Skydo Technologies Private Limited**, a cross-border fintech company based in Bengaluru, Karnataka, received **in-principle approval** from the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) to operate as a Payment Aggregator-Cross Border (**PA-CB**).

- Skydo also secured Payment Service Provider (**PSP**) approval from **Amazon**, an American multinational technology company headquartered in Washington, United States of America (USA).
- This approval allows Skydo to process payments for exporters participating in Amazon's Global Selling programme.

i.Founded in 2022, Skydo is among the **first in the cross-border payments industry** to receive RBI's approval.

- It primarily **serves small and medium-sized businesses** and freelancers by providing virtual foreign accounts for receiving international payments.

ii.The company works with global banks to provide a **comprehensive solution** for **invoicing, payments, and reconciliation**, processing over USD 250 million (mn) in annual export payments.

iii.Currently, only **five companies** have received final approval from the RBI to function as PA-CB, including Adyen India Technology Services Private, Amazon Pay India Private Limited, Cashfree Payments, IndiaIdeas.com, and Pay10 Services Private Limited.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Alok Kumar Agarwal Appointed MD and CEO of Zurich Kotak General Insurance

Alok Kumar Agarwal was appointed as the Managing Director (**MD**) and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) of Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Zurich Kotak General Insurance. He took charge of this post from January 01, 2025, succeeding Suresh Agarwal.

- His appointment came following Zurich completed the strategic majority stake acquisition of Mumbai based Kotak Mahindra General Insurance Company Limited (KGI) in June 2024.

i.Alok Agarwal has an extensive experience of more than 20 years in the insurance industry.

ii.Earlier, he served at various senior positions at ICICI Lombard General Insurance, managing diverse segments like: corporate, government, rural, crop and retail businesses.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Digantara Launches World's First Commercial Satellite SCOT for Advanced Space Monitoring

In January 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based aerospace company **Digantara**, backed by the Aditya Birla Group and the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), launched Space Camera for Object Tracking (**SCOT**) satellite, the **world's first commercial satellite** for Space Situational Awareness (SSA).

- Besides, Indian space-tech startup XDLINX Space Labs also launched its high-tech satellites to monitor earth and space objects.
- The satellites were launched aboard **SpaceX's Transporter-12 mission** from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California, the United States of America (USA).

About Space Camera for Object Tracking (SCOT):

As Earth's orbits become increasingly crowded with satellites and space debris, SSA plays a vital role in **preventing collisions** and ensuring the safety of spacecraft.

- SCOT contributes significantly in **improving safety** by offering precise and reliable tracking capabilities.

Key Features:

- i.** SCOT is designed to **monitor** Resident Space Objects (**RSOs**), significantly enhancing space safety by tracking objects as small as 5 centimetres (cm) in Low Earth orbit (LEO).
- ii** It provides continuous monitoring unaffected by weather or geographic limitations.
- iii.** Equipped with advanced technology, SCOT operates in a sun-synchronous orbit, ensuring consistent observation of the near-Earth environment.

XDLINX Space Labs launches ELEVATION-1 satellite:

Hyderabad(Telangana) based **XDLINX Labs Private Limited** in collaboration with the USA based Almagest Space Corporation launched its technology demonstrator satellite, **ELEVATION-1** which carried the world's first E-band communications payload.

- This will push data rates into the 10 Gigabits Per Second(Gbps) regime.

- i.**The ELEVATION-1 satellite, developed by XDLINX Spacelabs, is powered by Antaris' Cloud Platform and SatOS™, and was assembled, integrated, and tested by Hyderabad based Ananth Technologies Limited.
 - ii.**This 6U (Units) cubesat includes power, computing, avionics, and communication systems.
 - iii.**The spacecraft will test the world's first miniaturized space-grade E-band communication payload, and measurement.
 - iv.**Other transmission data will be used to develop advanced propagation models for Almagest's global high-speed and Ultra-High Throughput Screening(UHTS) LEO constellation.
- Note:** The E band represents the frequency range from 60 gigahertz(GHz) to 90 GHz.

About Digantara:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Anirudh Sharma

Headquarters– Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established– 2018

DRDO Carries Out Test of India's First Scramjet Combustor for Hypersonic Technology

In January 2025, The Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**) under the Ministry of Defence (MoD) successfully **carried out a ground test** of an active cooled **scramjet combustor**, lasting 120 seconds, marking a **first for India**.

- This test is part of India's effort to develop **hypersonic technology** powered by supersonic combustion ramjets (scramjets).
- This technology was **developed by** the Defence Research & Development Laboratory (**DRDL**), based in Hyderabad, Telangana, and part of the DRDO.

Key Points:

i. A significant achievement was the creation of a unique type of **endothermic scramjet fuel** developed entirely in India. This fuel, designed by DRDL in collaboration with industry experts, enhances cooling efficiency and simplifies ignition.

ii. Another accomplishment is the development of an advanced Thermal Barrier Coating (**TBC**). Made from a specialized ceramic material, this coating can **withstand extremely high temperatures**, even exceeding the melting point of steel.

- The coating is applied inside the engine using special techniques to improve its durability and performance.

iii. The scramjet combustor test showed its **ability to ignite and maintain stable combustion** under challenging conditions. This is a difficult task because the flame has to stay stable while air flows at speeds over 1.5 kilometres per second (km/s).

- To improve the engine's design and performance, advanced tools such as Computational Fluid Dynamics (**CFD**) simulations were used.

About Hypersonic Missiles:

Hypersonic missiles are highly advanced weapons that travel at **speeds over Mach 5**, which is more than five times the speed of sound (around 5,400 kilometres per hour, km/hr).

i. These missiles **are designed** to evade existing air defense systems and deliver swift, powerful strikes.

ii. A crucial element of hypersonic vehicles is the **scramjet engine**, which uses air from the atmosphere to sustain combustion at supersonic speeds without requiring moving parts.

About Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO):

Chairman– Samir V Kamat

Headquarters– New Delhi, Delhi

Established– 1958

SPORTS

Mumbai Marathon 2025: Berhane Tesfay & Joyce Chepkemoi Tele Win Men's & Women's Elite Race

In January 2025, **Eritrea's Berhane Tesfay** and **Kenya's Joyce Chepkemoi Tele** won the men's and women's elite races, respectively, at the **TATA Mumbai Marathon 2025** held in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- It is the 20th edition of the Mumbai Marathon, which is a World Athletics Gold Label Road Race event, organized by Procam International Private Limited. It was also a qualifier for the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo (Japan) in September 2025.
- The top three finishers in both men and women elite sections received a prize money of USD 50,000, USD 25,000 and USD 15,000 respectively.

i. In overall Elite Men Category, Berhane Tesfay (Eritrea) won the race followed by Merhawi Kesete (Eritrea) in second and Tesfaye Demeke (Ethiopia) in third place .

ii. In overall Elite Women Category, Joyce Chepkemoi Tele (Kenya) won the race followed by Shitaye Eshete (Bahrain) in second and Medina Deme Armino (Ethiopia) in third.

iii. Indian Elite Category, Anish Thapa won the race in Indian Men's Category while **Nirmaben Thakor** won the race in Indian women's category.

iv. Mohamed Muktar Jama Farah, widely known as Sir Mo Farah, represents Great Britain in athletics, a multiple Olympic and World Champion, as the International Event **Ambassador** for the 20th edition of the Mumbai Marathon.

Note: Ethiopians Hayle Lemi and Aberash Minsewo won the men's and women's elite races, respectively, at the Mumbai Marathon 2024

OBITUARY

Ballon d'Or Winner Denis Law Passed Away

In January 2025, Manchester United legend and Ballon d'Or winner **Denis Law**, passed away at the age of 84 in Aberdeen, Scotland. He was born on 24 February 1940 in Aberdeen.

- He is the only Scottish player to win both the **Ballon d'Or** and the **European Player of the Year** awards in **1964**.
- He was also known as "The King," "The Lawman," and "Holy Trinity."

i.In 1956, Denis Law began his career with Huddersfield Town and created a name for himself at Manchester United.

ii.He spent 11 years at Manchester United and won the league titles in 1965 and 1967 and the European Cup in 1968.

iii. With 237 goals in 404 games, he is the club's **third-highest** goalscorer after Wayne Rooney (253) and Sir Bobby Charlton (245).

IMPORTANT DAYS

Parakram Diwas 2025 – January 23

Parakram Diwas, also known as the Day of Valour, is observed annually across India on **23 January** to commemorate the birth anniversary of one of the Indian freedom fighters **Subhash Chandra Bose**, popularly called as Netaji.

- 23 January 2024 marks the 128th birth anniversary of Subhash Chandra Bose.

i.The **1st ever** Parakram Diwas was celebrated on **23 January 2021** on the 124th birth anniversary of Netaji.

ii.The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), based in Hyderabad, Telangana has been selected for the **Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2025** in the institutional category for its outstanding contributions to disaster management.

Parakram Diwas, also known as the Day of Valour, is observed annually across India on **23 January** to commemorate the birth anniversary of one of the Indian freedom fighters **Subhash Chandra Bose**, popularly called as Netaji.

- 23 January 2024 marks the 128th birth anniversary of Subhash Chandra Bose.

Background:

i.In **2021**, the Government of India (GoI) decided to commemorate 23 January, the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as **Parakram Diwas** to honour the contributions of Netaji to the Indian independence movement.

ii.The **1st ever** Parakram Diwas was celebrated on **23 January 2021** on the 124th birth anniversary of Netaji.

About Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose:

i. He was born on 23rd January 1897 in the Oriya Bazar in Cuttack, Orissa Division of Bengal Presidency (now Odisha).

ii. He Joined the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1921 and actively participated in the Indian Independence movement. He became the President of the INC twice, first in 1938, and again in 1939.

iii. Formation of Forward Bloc and Indian National Army (INA)

- In 1939, formed the Forward Bloc to unify all anti-British forces in India.
- In 1942, the Indian National Army (INA), also known as the Azad Hind Fauj, was formed in Southeast Asia to secure Indian independence with Japanese assistance.
- INA was initially led by Mohan Singh for a very brief period, Subhas Chandra Bose became the Commander-in-Chief in June 1943.
- On October 21, 1943, founded the Provisional Government of Free India. It was recognized by nine world powers, including Germany, Italy, Japan, and Myanmar. He passed away in August 1945 in a plane crash in Taiwan.

iv. Tribute to Subash Chandhra Bose

- In 2018, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi announced the renaming of three islands of Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) as a tribute to Netaji.
- The Ross Island was renamed as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Dweep, the Neil Island as Shaheed Dweep and the Havelock Island as Swaraj Dweep

Points to be noted:

- The title "**Netaji (Respected Leader)**" was given to Subhas Chandra Bose by Indian soldiers of the Indian National Army (INA) and German and Indian officials in Berlin, Germany in early 1942.
- Rabindranath Tagore gave Subhash Chandra Bose the title **Desh Nayak (hero of the country)**.
- On September 8, 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a 28-foot-tall statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose near India Gate in New Delhi.

INCOIS Hyderabad Awarded Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2025

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (**INCOIS**), based in Hyderabad, Telangana has been selected for the **Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar 2025** in the institutional category for its outstanding contributions to disaster management.

About INCOIS

- It was established in **1999** in Hyderabad, Telangana, and plays a pivotal role in India's disaster management by providing early warnings for ocean-related hazards.
- It set up the Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (**ITEWC**) to deliver the tsunami alerts within 10 minutes, serving both India and 28 Indian Ocean countries.
- It was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) as a leading **Tsunami Service Provider**, INCOIS clearly demonstrates or represents high standards in early warning systems.

About the Award

- The Government of India (GoI) has instituted an annual award known as **Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar** to recognize and honour the invaluable contribution rendered by individuals and organizations in India in the field of disaster management.
- Since 2022, the award is announced every year on 23rd January, the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.
- The award carries a cash prize of **Rs. 51 lakh** and a certificate in case of an institution and **Rs. 5 lakh** and a certificate in case of an individual.

STATE NEWS

Kerala launches 'KaWaCHaM' India's 1st Fully Integrated Disaster Risk Warning System

On January 21 2025, the Chief Minister (CM) of Kerala **Pinarayi Vijayan** launched the 'Kerala Warnings, Crisis and Hazard Management(**KaWaCHaM**) System', India's **first** fully integrated disaster warning system at the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA) in Thiruvananthapuram, **Kerala**.

- This advanced disaster risk warning system aims to enhance disaster preparedness and response capabilities while also issuing alerts for extreme weather events.
- It is developed by **KSDMA** with support from the National Disaster Management Authority (**NDMA**) and the World Bank (**WB**) as part of the National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project (NCRMP).

Note: The word *Kavacham* in Malayalam translates to 'shield', symbolising protection.

About KaWaCHaM:

i.The disaster warning system features a network of 126 siren-strobe light units and 93 emergency operation centers linked through a Virtual Private Network (VPN) and data center.

- Currently 91 sirens are installed , as a part of the first phase. The next phase will include the remaining sirens, alongside ongoing operational trials.
- Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam (Kerala) have the most sirens, with 13 each, while Kottayam, Idukki, and Wayanad (Kerala) have the fewest, with five each.

ii.The system will deliver timely alerts on extreme weather events, including heavy rain, strong winds, and sea surges, to the public via the "KaWaCHaM" warning sirens.

iii.It has a citizen portal and 24-hour emergency call centres. Through these platforms, the public can report hazards or seek help during emergencies.

iv.The system also stores critical data, such as the locations of water bodies, roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and other key infrastructure, to aid in disaster management.

v.The State Emergency Operations Centre (**SEOC**) will manage the KaWaCHaM system in Kerala.

Note: At present, the SDMA has been using social media, location-based Short Message Service (SMS), and other communication channels to share severe weather or disaster warnings from central agencies with the public.

About Kerala:

Chief Minister (**CM**) – Pinarayi Vijayan

Governor – Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar

Capital – Thiruvananthapuram

State Bird – The Great Hornbill

Dance – Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Thiruvathirakali (Kaikottikali), Theyyam

Tripura Gets New State Emblem with the Approval of MHA

In January 2025, Tripura Chief Minister (CM) Manik Saha announced that the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had approved the **New state emblem**. The state's history and culture will be prominently featured in the logo.

i. The proposal of the State Emblem of the government of Tripura has been examined by **Rule 4(2)** of the State Emblem of India (**Regulation of Use) Rules, 2007** (as amended in 2010) and determined to be in order.

ii. In the newly designed emblem, the Tripura map is positioned inside a saffron circle, and the national emblem of India is displayed within the outline of the map. Additionally, the Government of Tripura is written below the circle.

Appointments of New Chief Justices for Delhi and Bombay High Courts

On 21 January 2025, **Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya** was **sworn** in as the 33rd Chief Justice (**CJ**) of the **Delhi High Court** (HC), situated in New Delhi, Delhi.

- The **oath** of office was **administered** by Lieutenant (Lt.) Governor **Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena** at a ceremony held at Raj Niwas, New Delhi attended by Chief Minister (CM) of Delhi, **Atishi Marlena Singh** and senior judicial officials.
- He **succeeds Justice Vibhu Bakhru**, who served as the Acting Chief Justice prior to his appointment..

i. Before his appointment as the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya **served** as the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court.

ii. His appointment brought the court's strength to **38 judges**.

Justice Alok Aradhe was sworn in as the CJ of the Bombay High Court:

On the same day, Justice Alok Aradhe was sworn in as the **48th** Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court located in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- Justice Aradhe **succeeded** Justice **Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya**.
- The Governor of Maharashtra, **CP Radhakrishnan**, administered the oath of office during the same ceremony held at Raj Bhavan..

Note: Both appointments were made following the order of the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, based on the recommendation of the Supreme Court (SC) Collegium.

25th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Empowering India's Daughters: Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Completed 10 Years

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (**BBBP**) scheme, a flagship initiative led by the Government of India (GoI) which aims to protect, educate, and empower the girl child in India, has completed **10 years** of successful implementation.

- The scheme was launched by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on January 22, 2015 in Panipat, Haryana.

i.It is a centrally sponsored scheme (CSS) with 100% funding by the Central Government in all the districts of the country under Sambal vertical of Mission Shakti.

ii.Initially, It was a collaborative effort of MoWCD (Ministry of Women and Child Development) with Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW) and Ministry of Education (MoE);

- Later, MWCD collaborated with Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA), to expand the scope of BBBP.

iii.On January 22 2025, Union Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda, MoH&FW and Union Minister Annpurna Devi, MoWCD jointly inaugurated the 10 years anniversary celebration of BBBP at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi, Delhi.

iv.Following an oath-taking ceremony, a compendium of BBBP practices, Mission Vatsalya portal, Mission Shakti portal, and mobile application (app) of Mission Shakti were also launched at the event.

About Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD):

Union Minister- Annpurna Devi (Constituency- Kodarma, Jharkhand)

Union Minister of State (MoS)- Savitri Thakur (Constituency- Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, MP)

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- The scheme was launched by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on January 22, 2015 in Panipat, Haryana.
- Completion of 10 Years of BBBP marks a significant milestone which aligns with India's vision of a **Viksit Bharat 2047** and the global shift from Women's Development to Women-led Development.

Note: January 24 is observed annually as National Girl Child Day (NGCD) across the country, to raise awareness about the rights of a girl child. Theme for 2025 NGCD: 'Empowering Girls for a Bright Future'.

About BBBP:

i.It is a centrally sponsored scheme (CSS) with 100% funding by the Central Government in all the districts of the country under Sambal vertical of Mission Shakti.

- **Aim:** To address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR), prevent gender-biased sex-selective elimination and promote the survival, protection and education of the girl child.

ii.The scheme is now based on **multi-sectoral approach**, involving health, education, child development, and community awareness.

iii.Financial assistance varies based on the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) in districts:

- Rs 40 lakh per year for districts with an SRB less than equal to 918.
- Rs 30 lakh per year for districts with an SRB between 919-952.
- Rs 20 lakh for districts with an SRB greater than 952.

iv.Initially, It was a collaborative effort of MoWCD (Ministry of Women and Child Development) with Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoH&FW) and Ministry of Education (MoE);

- Later, MoWCD collaborated with Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and Ministry of Minority Affairs (MoMA), to expand the scope of BBBP.

Integration of BBBP with Mission Shakti:

i. Now, the BBBP is integrated with Mission Shakti, a comprehensive program for women's safety and empowerment, for implementation during the 15th Finance Commission (FC) period from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

ii. Mission Shakti comprises of two main sub-schemes, which are:

- **Sambal (Safety and Security):** This sub-scheme of Mission Shakti ensures women's safety through One Stop Centres (**OSCs**), Women Helpline (181), and BBBP, now expanded across the country. It also introduces Nari Adalat, offering an alternate grievance redressal mechanism for resolving minor issues like harassment and rights violations.
- **Samarthya (Empowerment):** This sub-scheme empowers women through Shakti Sadans, relief and rehabilitation homes; Sakhi Niwas which provides safe and secure place for stay for working women in the cities; Palna Creche which provides safe and secure place for children of working women.
- The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (**PMMVY**) now supports a 2nd child if it is a girl, promoting maternal health. The scheme also provides compensation for loss of wages due to pregnancy and childbirth.
- The SANKALP: HEW (Hub for Empowerment of Women) serves as a single window inter-sectoral convergence mechanism provided for all women to avail the benefits of Central and State Government schemes.

Key Objectives of BBBP:

i. To improve Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) by two points every year.

ii. To improve the percentage of institutional deliveries or sustained at the rate of 95% or above.

iii. To increase 1st Trimester Anti Natal Care (ANC) Registration by 1% annually.

iv. To increase enrolment at secondary education level and skilling of girls or women by 1% annually.

v. To check dropout rate among girls at secondary and higher secondary levels.

vi. To Raise awareness about safe Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM).

Key Progress:

i.Improvement in SRB: The national SRB improved from 918 (in 2014-15) to 930 (in 2023-24).

- The maximum increase – of 54 points– was recorded in Rajasthan, followed by Haryana (38 points), Himachal Pradesh (33 points) and Gujarat (29 points).
- Among the states which saw a fall in SRB, Odisha recorded the maximum decline of 23 points, followed by Karnataka (19 points) and Bihar (13 points).

ii.Increase in Girl’s Enrollment in Secondary Education: The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for girls has increased from 75.51% (in 2014-15) to 78% (in 2023-24). This indicates the positive influence of BBBP’s educational interventions.

iii.Increased Institutional Deliveries: BBBP also focused on improving healthcare access for women. Institutional deliveries increased from 61% (in 2014-15) to over 97.3% (by 2023-24).

Union Ministers JP Nadda and Annpurna Devi Jointly Inaugurated the 10th Anniversary Celebration of BBBP

On January 22 2025, Union Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda, MoH&FW and Union Minister Annpurna Devi, MoWCD jointly inaugurated the 10 years anniversary celebration of BBBP at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi, Delhi.

- The GoI has decided to celebrate the 10th anniversary of BBBP from January 22, 2025 to March 8, 2025, culminating on International Women’s Day.

Key Points:

i.While addressing the event, Union Health Minister highlighted about various schemes initiated by the GoI for women empowerment and their holistic development like: Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY); Ujjwala Yojana, Swachhta Abhiyan, Startup India,

ii.Following an oath-taking ceremony, a compendium of BBBP practices, Mission Vatsalya portal, Mission Shakti portal, and mobile application (app) of Mission Shakti were also launched at the event.

About Mission Vatsalya:

i.In 2021, MoWCD launched Mission Vatsalya which is a CSS, formerly known as the Child Protection Services (CPS) scheme, since 2009-10.

- The main objective of the mission is to ensure that every child in India has healthy and happy childhood.

About Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD):

Union Minister- Annpurna Devi (Constituency- Kodarma, Jharkhand)

Union Minister of State (**MoS**)- Savitri Thakur (Constituency- Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, MP)

ICRIER Report: India's Digital Economy to Contribute One-Fifth of GDP by 2030

In January 2025, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (**MeitY**) released a comprehensive report titled '[Estimation and Measurement of India's Digital Economy](#)', prepared by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (**ICRIER**). This marks the first attempt to quantify the digital sector's impact on India's income and employment.

- According to the report, India's digital economy is projected to grow nearly twice as fast as the overall economy, contributing to almost **one-fifth of national income** by **2029-30**.

i. The report estimates that India's digital economy accounted for **11.74%** of India's income in 2022-23, contributing **Rs. 28.94 lakh crore** (Approximately USD 368 billion) in Gross Value Added (**GVA**) and **Rs. 31.64 lakh crore** (Approximately USD 402 billion) in Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**).

ii. In 2022-23, the digital economy accounted for **14.67 million** workers or **2.55%** of India's workforce

About Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER):

ICRIER is an autonomous, policy-oriented, not-for-profit, economic policy think tank.

Chairman – Pramod Bhasin

Headquarters – New Delhi (Delhi)

Founded – 1981

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- According to the report, India's digital economy is projected to grow nearly twice as fast as the overall economy, contributing to almost **one-fifth of national income** by **2029-30**.
- In less than six years, the digital economy's share will surpass that of agriculture or manufacturing in India.

Methodologies:

i.The report uses global methods from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**) and the Asian Development Bank (**ADB**) to estimate the size of India's digital economy as a share of national income and employment.

ii.It also includes the digital shares of industries such as trade, Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI), and education.

iii.The survey was conducted in partnership with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and supported by MeitY, especially for data from the banking sector. The sample was restricted to the corporate sector and comprised the top 10-30 companies in each industry, especially those in which digitalisation was most likely.

Key Findings:

Current contribution:

The report estimates that India's digital economy accounted for **11.74%** of India's income in 2022-23, contributing **Rs. 28.94 lakh crore** (Approximately USD 368 billion) in Gross Value Added (**GVA**) and **Rs. 31.64 lakh crore** (Approximately USD 402 billion) in Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**).

- This share is projected to rise to **13.42%** by 2024-25

Key Contributors:

i.The largest contribution, **7.83%** of the national GVA, is driven by sectors such as Information and Communication Services, Telecommunications (ICT), and the manufacturing of electronics, computers, and communication equipment.

- While the traditional ICT sector remains the largest component of the digital economy, digital platforms and the digitalization of brick-and-mortar sectors are growing rapidly

ii.The new digital industries, including Big Tech, digital platforms, intermediaries, and firms reliant on digital intermediaries, contribute nearly 2% of the national GVA.

iii.The digital contribution of three traditional industries (BFSI, trade, and education), not included in the OECD framework but part of the estimates, makes up 2% of the national GVA.

Contribution to Employment:

i. In 2022-23, the digital economy accounted for **14.67 million** workers or **2.55%** of India's workforce.

ii. Agriculture accounted for 263.6 million workers (or 45.8% of the total workforce), while manufacturing employed 65.6 million workers (or 11.4% of the workforce).

Global Rank :

According to India's Digital Economy Report 2024 states that India is the **third largest** digitalised country in the world in terms of overall economy-wide digitalisation after the United States of America (**USA**) and **China**.

- It ranks **12th** among (Group of 20) G20 nations in individual user digitalisation.

About Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER):

ICRIER is an autonomous, policy-oriented, not-for-profit, economic policy think tank.

Chairman – Pramod Bhasin

Headquarters – New Delhi (Delhi)

Founded – 1981

About Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity):

Union Minister– Ashwini Vaishnaw (Rajya Sabha- Odisha)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Jitin Prasada (Constituency- Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

MNRE : Total RE Installed Capacity Rises 15.84% to 209.44 GW in 2024

According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (**MNRE**), **India** has made **significant strides** in its Renewable Energy (**RE**) **journey**, strengthening its position as a global leader in clean energy.

- As of December 2024, India's total RE installed capacity has reached **209.44 Gigawatt (GW)**, a 15.84% increase compared to 180.80 GW in December 2023.
- The total capacity added during 2024 amounted to 28.64 GW, representing a significant Year-on-Year(YoY) increase of 119.46% compared to the 13.05 GW added in 2023.

i. Solar energy dominated, with **24.5 GW** of new capacity installed and its cumulative installed capacity increased to 97.86 GW in 2024 from 73.32 GW in 2023.

ii. Wind energy also contributed significantly to India's RE goals. A total of **3.4 GW** of wind capacity was added in 2024.

About Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE):

Union Minister – Pralhad Joshi(Constituency – Dharwad, Karnataka)

Minister of State(MoS) – Shripad Yesso Naik(Rajya Sabha – North Goa)

According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (**MNRE**), **India** has made **significant strides** in its Renewable Energy (**RE**) **journey**, strengthening its position as a global leader in clean energy.

- As of December 2024, India's total RE installed capacity has reached **209.44 Gigawatt (GW)**, a 15.84% increase compared to 180.80 GW in December 2023.
- The total capacity added during 2024 amounted to 28.64 GW, representing a significant Year-on-Year(YoY) increase of 119.46% compared to the 13.05 GW added in 2023.

Note: As of January 20, 2025, the country has reached a milestone of **217.62 GW**, with a target to achieve **500 GW** of non-fossil fuel-based energy capacity by 2030.

Key Achievements in 2024:

The year **2024** witnessed **record-breaking growth in solar and wind energy installations**, driven by policy reforms, government incentives, and investments in domestic manufacturing.

i.Expansion of Solar Energy: Solar energy dominated, with **24.5 GW** of new capacity installed and its cumulative installed capacity increased to **97.86 GW** in 2024 from 73.32 GW in 2023.

- Utility-scale solar installations led the way, adding 18.5 GW, with **Rajasthan**, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu (TN) accounting for 71% of the total.
- The rooftop solar segment also grew significantly, with 4.59 GW installed, driven by initiatives like the Prime Minister Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (PMSGMBY), which facilitated 7 lakh rooftop installations in less than a year.

ii.Expansion of Wind Energy:

- Wind energy also contributed significantly to India's renewable energy goals. A total of **3.4 GW of wind capacity** was added in 2024, reflecting a 21% increase from 2023.
- In 2024, the total wind capacity reached **48.16 GW**, a growth of 7.64% from 2023.
- **Gujarat** emerged as the leader with 1,250 Megawatt (MW) of new installations, followed by Karnataka with 1,135 MW and TN with 980 MW. Together, these three states accounted for 98% of the total wind capacity additions, reaffirming their dominance in India's wind power sector.

iii. Expansion of Bioenergy and Small Hydro Power:

- Bioenergy's installed capacity rose from 10.84 GW in December 2023 to 11.35 GW in December 2024, reflecting a 4.70% increase.
- Small hydro power projects saw incremental growth, with installed capacity increasing from 4.99 GW in 2023 to 5.10 GW in 2024, representing a 2.20% rise.

Key points :

- i. The Government of India (GoI) focused on enhancing the viability of **green hydrogen** by reducing costs and attracting investments. This move is aimed at positioning India as a global leader in green hydrogen technology.
- ii. Efforts were made to **ramp up domestic production of solar photovoltaic (PV)** panels and wind turbines, boosting India's potential to become a hub for renewable energy manufacturing on the global stage.
- iii. The MNRE proposed **investments in inter-state transmission systems** to efficiently transfer power from renewable-rich states like Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh (MP), supporting the country's growing energy needs.

Roadmap for 2025:

As India enters 2025, addressing challenges related to regulatory frameworks, financing models, and infrastructure development will be essential for continued progress in the RE sector.

- i. Sustaining the growth of India's RE sector will rely on continued policy support, increased private investment, and the development of emerging technologies such as green hydrogen and energy storage.

Recent Related News:

According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) data released in December 2024, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh (UP) are the top 3 states with the highest number of rooftop solar installations under 'Prime Minister -Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana(PMSGMBY)'.

- As per the data, Gujarat has topped among all states in the country with 2,86,545 rooftop solar installations, followed by Maharashtra (with 1,26,344 installations) and UP (with 53,423 installations) ranked at 2nd and 3rd spot, respectively.

About Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE):

Union Minister – Pralhad Joshi(Constituency – Dharwad, Karnataka)

Minister of State(MoS) – Shripad Yesso Naik(Rajya Sabha – North Goa)

India & South Korea Conducted Exchange of Notes for NCERT's Technical Cooperation Project

In January 2025, **India** and **South Korea** conducted an exchange of notes for the technical cooperation project titled 'Strengthening Vocational Education and Training in Mechatronics in India' in New Delhi(Delhi).

- The Exchange of Notes was signed by **Manisha Sinha**, Additional Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Ministry of Finance (MoF) and **H.E. Lee Seong-ho**, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to India for the Republic of Korea.
- The project will be implemented in collaboration with the Korea International Cooperation Agency (**KOICA**) of the Government of Republic of Korea.

Key Points:

i.This project spans over a two-year and will be carried out in collaboration with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (**NCERT**) at the Regional Institute of Education (RIE), Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh (MP).

- This is the **first** project being implemented with the assistance of KOICA in India.

ii.Under this partnership, South Korea will invest **USD 2 million** (approximately 2.9 billion KRW) by 2027 to launch a large-scale initiative aimed at enhancing India's vocational and technical education capabilities.

- This marks the first-ever grant-based development cooperation project between South Korea and India.

iii.It aims to create a strong framework for vocational education in mechatronics by developing curriculum, textbooks, and teacher manuals, and providing necessary equipment.

iv.This partnership would be further strengthened and consolidated with the signing of the exchange of notes for the NCERT project.

Points to Note:

i.In October 2016, the Republic of Korea was designated as India's official development assistance (**ODA**) partner for development cooperation.

ii.In 2015, the bilateral relationship between the two nations was upgraded to a "Special Strategic Partnership."

About South Korea:

President – Yoon Suk Yeol

Capital – Seoul

Currency – South Korean Won (KRW)

FIEO and Credlix Signed MoU to Empower Indian Exporters with Financial and Logistical Support

In January 2025, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (**FIEO**), the apex body for exporters in India, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with Singapore-based **Credlix**, a global leader in supply chain financing solutions, to boost the growth of Indian exporters and strengthen their international presence.

- This collaboration aims to streamline global trade by providing exporters with innovative financial solutions, logistical support, and other critical resources.

Key Points:

i.The partnership also aims to address key challenges faced by exporters by combining the extensive network of FIEO with expertise of Credlix in financial services.

ii.Various initiatives such as workshops, training, financing advisory and technological support will be provided to help businesses enhance operations effectively.

iii.As per the MoU, technological and logistical solutions from Credlix, such as warehousing and supply chain management will be used to address operational hurdles faced by the exporters.

iv.FIEO will actively promote the initiative, encourage participation of exporters, and guide businesses in navigating complex international markets.

Note: In Financial Year 2023-24 (FY24), the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector contributed 45.73% of India's exports.

About Credlix:

It is the digital supply chain financing platform from Moglix (Mogli Labs Private Limited), one of Asia's largest Business-to-Business (B2B) commerce companies. It is dedicated to providing innovative financial solutions to Small Micro Enterprises (SMEs) across the world.

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Rahul Garg

Headquarters- Singapore, Singapore

Established- 2015

About Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO):

It was constituted by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry (MoC&I) in 1965, with its member contributing nearly 70% of India's exports.

President- Ashwani Kumar

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

MoD signs Rs 1,561 crore deal with Heavy Vehicles Factory for 47 T-72 Bridge Laying Tanks

In January 2025, the Ministry of Defence (**MoD**) signed a **Rs 1,561-crore** deal with Chennai(Tamil Nadu, TN) based Heavy Vehicles Factory(HVF), a unit of Armoured Vehicle Nigam Limited(AVNL), for the acquisition of **47 Tank (T)-72** Bridge Laying Tanks (BLTs) for the Indian Army(**IA**).

- The contract was signed by the senior officials of the MoD and HVF, AVNL, in the presence of Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary of the MoD.
- T-72 BLTs are manufactured by HVF under the license from Russia.

i.The deal is categorized as Buy IDDM(Indian-Indigenously Designed, Developed, and Manufactured) procurement category, introduced in India's Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2016.

ii.The T-72 BLTs is an important equipment

that is used by the Mechanised Forces of the IA to launch bridges during both offensive and defensive operations.

iii.The T-72 BLT, also known as BLT T-72, features a scissors-type bridge that can be deployed in two configurations: a 20-meter(m) span supporting vehicles up to 60 tons, and a 22m span supporting vehicles up to 70 tons.

NITI Aayog & NASSCOM Foundation Partner to digitally empower One lakh People

In January 2025, National Institution for Transforming India (**NITI Aayog**) and the National Association of Software and Service Companies (**NASSCOM**) Foundation have entered into a partnership to provide **digital skills** to one lakh individuals with an aim to reduce the issue of digital divide.

- The collaboration comes under the Aspirational Blocks Programme(**ABP**), and is aligned with the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (**PMGDISHA**).
- The project will focus on marginalized groups including women and tribal communities to improve their access to essential digital tools and e-governance services.

i.It will initially target **60** Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) blocks in its first phase, promoting digital literacy and awareness of government schemes and will expand to include all **500** aspirational blocks for a broader digital inclusion.

ii.The program focuses on training individuals between **12-60 years** in essential computer skills, cybersecurity, and internet usage.

iii.It will also integrate local community members as trainers and digital ambassadors and will conduct door-to-door campaigns and community mobilization to raise awareness about the benefits of digital literacy and government schemes.

BANKING & FINANCE

PNB MetLife Partners with Truhome Finance to Offer Group Credit Life Insurance

In January 2025, Mumbai based PNB MetLife India Insurance Company Limited (**PNB MetLife**) partnered with Chennai based **Truhome Finance** (formerly known as Shriram Housing Finance Limited) to offer Group Credit Life insurance to home loan customers of Truhome Finance.

i.The partnership is a major step towards PNB MetLife's mission of *Milkar Life Aage Badhein*, highlighting the dedication to broadening its reach and improving financial inclusion.

ii.The Group Credit Life Insurance solutions provide home owners and their families with financial security by covering outstanding loan liabilities in the event of an emergency at 165 Truhome Finance branches in 17 states of India.

iii.This collaboration contributes to the vision of '**Insurance for All by 2047**' by ensuring financial security within reach for more individuals and families.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Jio Financial Services and BlackRock Expanding Into Stock Broking Sector

In January 2025, Mumbai based Jio Financial Services Limited (**JFSL**) announced that its joint venture, Jio BlackRock Investment Advisers Private Limited, has established a wholly owned subsidiary called '**Jio BlackRock Broking Private Limited**' to enter the broking business, subject to regulatory approvals.

i.Jio BlackRock Investment Advisers Private Limited was established with the primary goal of providing investment advising services.

ii.In September 2024 JFSL and US based BlackRock, Inc. contributed **Rs 3 crores each** to the joint venture. **iii.** In October 2024, Jio BlackRock Investment Advisers Private Limited received approval from Securities Exchange Board of India(SEBI) to start its Mutual fund business.

NTPC Partners with Sri Lanka for Major Solar Project

In January 2025, New Delhi(Delhi) based NTPC Limited(formerly known as National Thermal Power Corporation) has partnered with Ceylon Electricity Board of Sri Lanka to develop a 50 Megawatt (MW) (extendable to 120 MW) solar project in Sampoor, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

- Trincomalee Power Company Limited (**TPCL**) which is a joint venture (JV) between NTPC Limited and the Ceylon Electricity Board, will see the establishment of the solar facility in Sampoor.

i.After discussions with a number of Sri Lankan stakeholders, the tariff for the project has been fixed at **5.97 US cents** per unit.

ii.This solar project would diversify Sri Lanka's energy mix by significantly increasing Sri Lanka's clean energy capacity and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

iii.With this initiative, NTPC, India's leading power generation company under the Ministry of Power (MoP), makes a significant step toward sustainable energy practices and strengthens regional ties.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Forbes 2025 Billionaires list: Elon Musk Emerges as the Richest Individual in 2025

According to the **World's Billionaires List 2025** released by **Forbes**, **Elon Musk** secured the top spot with a net worth of **USD 433.9 billion** largely driven by SpaceX's valuation of USD 350 billion.

- Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has secured the 2nd position with USD 239.4 billion while Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg bagged the 3rd spot by surpassing Oracle founder Larry Ellison net worth of USD 211.8 billion.

i. Elon Musk has become the **first** individual in history to cross a net worth of USD 400 billion, mainly due to SpaceX's valuation of **USD 350 billion**.

ii. According to Forbes' World's Billionaires List 2025, the **United States of America (USA)** is on the top with a record **813** billionaires, followed by **China** with **473** and **India** on the 3rd spot with **200** billionaires.

According to the **World's Billionaires List 2025** released by **Forbes**, **Elon Musk** secured the top spot with a net worth of **USD 433.9 billion** largely driven by SpaceX's valuation of USD 350 billion.

- Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has secured the 2nd position with USD 239.4 billion while Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg bagged the 3rd spot by surpassing Oracle founder Larry Ellison net worth of USD 211.8 billion.

About Elon Musk:

i. Elon Musk has become the **first** individual in history to cross a net worth of USD 400 billion, mainly due to SpaceX's valuation of **USD 350 billion**.

ii. There has been an increase of USD 91 billion in his net worth since December 2024 leading to SpaceX being the most valuable private company worldwide.

iii. Besides SpaceX, he also has the ownership of X Corp. (the company that operates the social media platform X, formerly Twitter), and has role in the formation of the Boring Company, xAI (Artificial Intelligence), Neuralink, and OpenAI.

Key Highlights:

i. According to Forbes' World's Billionaires List 2025, the **United States of America (USA)** is on the top with a record **813** billionaires, followed by **China** with **473** and **India** on the 3rd spot with **200** billionaires.

ii. As of January 1, 2025, the world's **10** richest individuals have a combined net worth of **USD 1.9 trillion**, up from USD 1.8 trillion in December 2024. .

iii. The **8** technology leaders, including Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jensen Huan, Larry Ellison, Jeff Bezos, Michael Dell, and Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin have around **USD 600 billion** of the USD 1.5 trillion increase among the world's wealthiest individuals.

iv. Jensen Huang, the CEO and co-founder of Nvidia (10th spot) has entered the list of top 10 richest people for the first time with a net worth of USD 120.2 billion.

- The company's shares surged by 171% in 2024, totaling a market capitalisation of USD 3.28 trillion, making it the 2nd most valuable company after Apple.

Top 5 richest people in the world:

Rank	Name	Net Worth (USD)	Source of Wealth	Country
1	Elon Musk	433.9 billion	Tesla, SpaceX	United States of America (USA)
2	Jeff Bezos	239.4 billion	Amazon	The USA
3	Mark Zuckerberg	211.8 billion	Facebook	The USA
4	Larry Ellison	204.6 billion	Oracle	The USA
5	Bernard Arnault	181.3 billion	LVMH	France

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Amrit Mohan Prasad to Hold Additional Charge as BCAS DG

On 22 January 2025, **Amrit Mohan Prasad**, the Director General (DG) of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), was given the **additional** charge of **DG** of the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (**BCAS**) for six months.

- The appointment was approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (**ACC**) with effect from **1 November 2024**, or till the joining of the regular incumbent or until further orders, whichever is the earlier.
- He succeeded **Zulfiqar Hasan**, who retired on 31 October 2024.

Key Points:

- i. Amrit Mohan Prasad is a 1989-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the Odisha cadre.
- ii. He had held the position of Jail DG and served as the Special DG in the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

About the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS):

- i. BCAS is the regulating body for civil aviation security in India. It was reorganized as an independent department within the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) on 1 April 1987.
- ii. It is the proper authority for implementing Annexure-17 to the Chicago Convention of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and it is led by an officer of the rank of Director General of Police (DGP) and is designated as DG.
- iii. DG of BCAS is in charge of developing, implementing, and maintaining the National Civil Aviation Security Programme (**NCASP**).

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 1978

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

ISRO Dispatches Crew Module for First Uncrewed Mission of Gaganyaan

In January 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka) based Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (**LPSC**) of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) dispatched the Crew Module for the first uncrewed mission of Gaganyaan (**G1**) to Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh (AP). It has completed the integration of the liquid propulsion system.

Key Points:

i.The Crew Module Propulsion System (**CMPS**) is a bi-propellant Reaction Control System (RCS) designed for precise three-axis control (Pitch, Yaw, and Roll) for the crew module.

- The control will be initiated following separation of service module during the descent and re-entry phase until the deployment of parachute-based deceleration system.

ii.It has 12 thrusters, each producing **100N (Newton)** thrust, as well as a propellant feed mechanism and high-pressure gas bottles.

- The 100 N thrusters are small rocket motors used for spacecraft propulsion.

iii.The Crew Module Uprighting System (CMUS) designed by Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) was also included into the module at LPSC.

v.The Crew Module will also go through additional integration operations including avionics package assembly, electrical harnessing, and tests at VSSC, before being delivered to the U R Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru, for the last step of Orbital Module integration.

About Gaganyaan :

Gaganyaan, a crewed spacecraft being developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The first crewed flight is planned for 2026.

- India would become the 4th nation to launch its own crewed spacecraft, after Russia, the United States of America(USA), and China.
- Gaganyaan will consist of two parts, the Crew Module (CM) and the Service Module (SM), which together will form the orbital module.

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO):

Chairman – Dr. V. Narayanan

Headquarters – Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established – 1969

Sarla Aviation Unveiled India's 1st Air Taxi Prototype 'Shunya', Expected to be launched by 2028

In January 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based aerospace startup company, **Sarla Aviation Private Limited** unveiled **India's 1st** electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) air taxi prototype, '**Shunya**', at the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, held at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, Delhi.

- For the initial phase, the company aims to launch the electric air taxi in Bengaluru by 2028 to become the 1st to introduce urban air transport in India.

Key Points:

- i.**The company further plans to gradually extend the electric air taxis services to cities like: Mumbai (Maharashtra), Delhi (Delhi), Pune (Maharashtra) and other major Indian cities.
- ii.**Sarla Aviation also plans to introduce a free air ambulance service, to address the urgent medical transportation requirements in urban areas.
- iii.**The company is expected to offer air taxi services at prices competitive with existing premium taxi services.
- iv.**Sarla Aviation also announced plans to launch a free air ambulance service to address urgent medical needs in urban areas.

About Shunya Prototype:

- i.**It is designed basically for short trips within the range of **20 to 30 kilometers** (kms) and can reach a maximum speed of **250 kilometers per hour** (kmph).
- ii.**The vehicle will have the capacity to accommodate up to 6 passengers and carry a maximum load of 680 kilogram (kg).It is the highest payload eVTOL vehicle currently in the market.
- iii.**Shunya will help to address the challenges like: traffic congestion and pollution, which are generally faced by most of the major Indian cities.

About Sarla Aviation Private Limited:

The startup company was founded in October 2023 by Adrian Schmidt, Rakesh Gaonkar, and Shivam Chauhan. It is named after Sarla Thakral, 1st female pilot in India. She received her pilot license at the age of 21 in 1936.

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Adrian Schmidt

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

ENVIRONMENT

Researchers Discovered Two New Goby Fish Species in AP

In January 2025, Researchers from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) discovered two unrecorded goby fish species, '**Hemigobius hoevenii**' and '**Mugilogobius tigrinus**', at Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh (AP).

- This discovery is significant as it is the first time *Mugilogobius tigrinus* has been observed along India's eastern coastline.

i.Both species belong to the group of fish commonly known as "**gobies**". Most gobies are found in estuarine areas, especially around mangroves.

ii.Gobies are small, carnivorous fish that live on the bottom and are found throughout the world, but they are especially common in tropical areas.

iii.They have a significant impact on the ecosystem. They can be used as indicators of environmental health and occupy different levels in the food chain.

iv.Of the 135 goby species found along India's coasts, 95 species are recorded in Indian mangroves, with 53 species found in the Coringa wildlife sanctuary.

OBITUARY

Former El Salvador President Mauricio Funes Passed Away

In January 2025, Former El Salvador President **Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena** passed away at the age of 65 in Managua, Nicaragua. He was born on 18 October 1959 in San Salvador, El Salvador.

- He served as the President of El Salvador from 2009 to 2014.

About Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena:

i. Mauricio Funes is a television journalist. He began his career as a Cable News Network (CNN) correspondent and war reporter.

ii. He was well-known for his in-depth interviews with politicians and for exposing corruption on his popular interview show.

iii. He ran in the 2009 presidential race for the former leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (**FMLN**).

- He won the presidential elections, defeating Rodrigo Ávila of the conservative National Republican Alliance, known as Arena.

iv. He was plagued by charges of corruption. In 2016, he fled to Nicaragua, where he spent his last nine years in the protection of Daniel Ortega, the president of Nicaragua.

About El Salvador:

President – Nayib Armando Bukele Ortez

Capital – San Salvador

Currency – United States Dollar(USD)

IMPORTANT DAYS

International Day of Education 2025 – January 24

The United Nations (UN)'s **International Day of Education** (IDE) is annually observed across the globe on **24 January** to celebrate the role of education in peace and development.

- 24 January 2025 marks the **7th** observance of the IDE.
- The 2025 theme of IDE is "**AI and education: Preserving human agency in a world of automation**".

Background:

i. On 3 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the resolution A/RES/73/25 proclaiming 24 January of every year as International Day of Education.

- The resolution was co-authored by Nigeria and 58 other UN Member States.

ii. The 1st ever International Day of Education was celebrated on 24 January **2019**.

About United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organisation (UNESCO):

Director-General (DG)- Audrey Azoulay

Headquarters- Paris, France

Member Nations- 194

Established-1945

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- **24 January 2025** marks the **7th observance** of the IDE.
- The International Day of Education encourages reflections on the power of education to equip individuals and communities to navigate, understand and influence technological advancement.

Theme:

The **2025 theme** of IDE is "**AI and education: Preserving human agency in a world of automation**".

- The theme focuses on how education can help people understand and control Artificial Intelligence (**AI**). It aims to ensure AI is used in ways that respect human rights and support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Note: In India, National Education Day is celebrated on November 11 every year in honour of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the first Education Minister of independent India.

Background:

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Education: A Key to Sustainable Development

i. In September 2015, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting education as key to achieving all 17 goals. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 focuses on ensuring inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.

ii. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right to education, requiring free and compulsory elementary education.

iii. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child adds that countries must make higher education accessible to all.

UNESCO dedicates the IDE 2025 to Artificial Intelligence

AI is becoming more common in education, with over two-thirds of secondary students in high-income countries already using generative AI for schoolwork.

i.A UNESCO survey (May 2023) found only **10% of schools and universities have an official AI framework**. By 2022, just 7 countries created AI frameworks for teachers, and 15 included AI training in their national curricula.

ii.In the field of education, UNESCO published the first-ever Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research in September 2023, as well as two AI competency frameworks for students and teachers in 2024.

iii.These publications include the suggestion to set an age limit of 13 for the use of AI in the classroom.

iv.Around 244 million children and adolescents worldwide are out of school, and 617 million cannot read or do basic math. In sub-Saharan Africa, less than 40% of girls finish lower secondary school, and 4 million refugee children and youth are out of school. This violation of their right to education is unacceptable.

2025 Events:

On 24 January 2025, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning hosted the webinar '**Lifelong learning in the age of AI**' in Paris, France.

About United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO):

Director-General (**DG**)- Audrey Azoulay

Headquarters- Paris, France

Member Nations- 194

Established-1945

National Girl Child Day 2025- January 24

National Girl Child Day (**NGCD**) is annually observed across India on **24th January** to promote awareness about the rights of a girl child and to promote the importance of their education, health, and nutrition. The day addresses issues like child marriage, discrimination and other challenges faced by girls in Indian society.

- **24th January 2025** marks the observance of **18th NGCD**.
- The theme of the **NGCD 2025** is "Empowering the Future of India".

Background:

- i.** NGCD was established in 2008 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (**MoWCD**).
- ii.** The first ever NGCD was observed on **24th January 2008**.

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Background:

- i.** NGCD was established in 2008 by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (**MoWCD**).
- ii.** The first ever NGCD was observed on **24th January 2008**.

Initiatives for Girl Child Development

1. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):**

Launched in 2015 to address declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR), prevent gender-biased elimination, and promote survival, protection, and education of girls. Integrated with Mission Shakti for 2021–2026.

2. **UDAAN:**

Launched by Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 2014 under the guidance of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to improve girl students' enrollment in engineering institutions by bridging the gap between school education and entrance exams.

3. **Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG):**

Introduced in 2010 for girls aged 11–14 to improve nutrition, address gender issues, and support overall development.

4. **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY):**

A small savings scheme launched in 2015 for girls under BBBP, offering an 8.2% interest rate for future financial needs.

5. **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (MHS):** Launched in 2011 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to promote menstrual hygiene among rural girls aged 10–19.

6. **POSHAN Abhiyaan** (erstwhile National Nutrition Mission): Launched in March 2018 to improve the nutritional status of children (0–6 years), adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.

Initiatives to empower and protect the girl child:

- **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**, aims to eliminate child marriage.
- **The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**, addresses child abuse, with updated rules in 2020 to enhance its implementation.
- **The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015**, ensures the care and protection of children in need.
- **Mission Vatsalya** launched in 2021 focuses on child development and protection, with services like the Child Helpline and the Track Child Portal to assist missing children.
- **Track Child Portal (2012)**: This portal helps match missing children reported at police stations with found children residing in Child Care Institutions (CCIs).
- **PM CARES for Children Scheme**: Launched in 2021, supports children orphaned by COVID-19, offering financial, educational, and health assistance.
- **NIMHANS** (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences) and **E-SAMPARK** (System for Accessing, Managing, and Promoting Awareness & Reach of Key Services): Provide mental health support and medical care to affected children.

Sex Selection and Abortion:

- **PNDT (Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) Act, 1994** (amended in 2002) prohibits sex selection and misuse of prenatal diagnostic techniques.
- **MTP Act (Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act)**: Allows abortion of fetuses with risks of severe physical or mental disabilities but prohibits sex-based selection, even for genetic diseases.

26th & 27th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Sukanya Samridhdhi Yojana Completed Decade of Transforming Lives

Sukanya Samridhdhi Yojana (**SSY**), a flagship initiative of Government of India (**GoI**) which aims to secure the financial future of girl children in India, has completed **10 years** of successful implementation.

- The scheme was launched by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on January 22, 2015 as part of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (**BBBP**) campaign in Panipat(Haryana).

i.As of November 2024, more than 4.1 crore SSAs have been opened under SSY.

ii.As of November 2024, Uttar Pradesh (UP) emerged as the largest contributor to SSY, with 45 lakh accounts have been opened under the scheme, followed by Tamil Nadu (TN) (30 lakh) and Bihar (22 lakh).

About Ministry of Finance (MoF):

Union Minister- Nirmala Sitharaman (Rajya Sabha- Karnataka)

Minister of State (MoS)- Pankaj Chaudhary (Constituency- Maharajganj, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

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About Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY):

i.Small Deposit Scheme: It is a small deposit scheme, designed to meet the education and marriage expenses of a girl child.

ii.Eligibility Criteria: As per the scheme, the guardian can open the account immediately after the birth of the girl child till she attains the age of 10 years.

- The girl child should be a resident of India from the time of maturity or closure of the account.
- Maximum one account can be opened per child. However, parents/guardians are allowed to open a maximum of two accounts in case of twins or triplets.

iii.Documents required to open SSA: Sukanya Samriddhi Account (SSA) Opening Form, Birth certificate of girl child, Identity(ID) proof and resident proof (as per Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Know Your Customer,KYC).

iv.Minimum and Maximum deposit: Under this scheme, parents are allowed to open SSY accounts for girls at any post office or designated commercial bank branch.

- The minimum deposit amount required to open SSY is **Rs 250**, and subsequent deposits can be made in multiples of Rs 50, provided that at least Rs 250 is deposited in a Financial Year (FY).
- Maximum deposit of **Rs 1.5 lakh per FY** can be maintained in the account under the SSY.
- Maximum time period for which deposits can be made is 15 years from the account opening date.

Note: As per Section 80C of the Income Tax Act of 1961, the parent making SSY investment can avail tax deduction benefit of up to Rs 1.5 lakh in a FY.

v.Guardian manage SSA: The account is managed by the guardian until the girl child reaches the **age of 18**.

vi.Maturity Period: The account matures on completion of a period of 21 years from the date of opening of account or until the marriage of girl (after 18 years)

vii. Interest rate on SSA: Initially, when the scheme was launched in 2015, it offered 9.1% interest rate and since then, the interest rate on SSA have been fluctuated. The interest rate on SSA is revised quarterly by the **Ministry of Finance (MoF)**.

- Since January 2024, the SSA has offered an interest rate of **8.2%**.

viii. Interest Calculation: Interest on SSA is calculated every month on the lowest balance in the account between the close of the 5th and the end of the month.

ix. Withdrawals: An account holder is allowed to withdraw a maximum 50% of the balance at the end of the preceding FY, specifically for educational purposes.

- This withdrawal is permissible only after the account holder attains the age of 18 or completes the 10th standard, whichever comes first.
- Also, withdrawals can be made either as lump sum or in installments, with a maximum of one withdrawal per year for up to 5 years.

x. Premature Closure: The premature closure of SSA is allowed after the completion of 5 years of opening the account in the case of account holder's untimely death.

- Premature closure of account is allowed in some other cases like: account holder facing life-threatening medical issues or the death of the guardian. The account office will consider premature closure only after thorough documentation is provided.

Key Points:

i. As of November 2024, more than **4.1 crore** SSAs have been opened under SSY.

ii. As of November 2024, Uttar Pradesh (**UP**) emerged as the largest contributor to SSY, with 45 lakh accounts have been opened under the scheme, followed by Tamil Nadu (TN) (30 lakh) and Bihar (22 lakh).

About Ministry of Finance (MoF):

Union Minister- Nirmala Sitharaman (Rajya Sabha- Karnataka)

Minister of State (**MoS**)- Pankaj Chaudhary (Constituency- Maharajganj, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

Union Minister Rajnath Singh Flags-off 'SANJAY – The Battlefield Surveillance System' from New Delhi

On 24th January 2025, Union Minister **Rajnath Singh**, Ministry of Defence (MoD) flagged off '**SANJAY**', the Battlefield Surveillance System (BSS) from South Block, New Delhi, Delhi.

- It has been indigenously and jointly developed by the Indian Army (**IA**) and Bengaluru(Karnataka) based Bharat Electronics Limited (**BEL**) , establishing a favorable environment for the realization of "Aatmanirbharta" as a sequel to the IA's "**Year of Technology Absorption.**"
- This system has been developed under the Buy (Indian) category at a cost of **Rs 2,402 crore.**

Key People:

Union Minister of State(MoS) Sanjay Seth, MoD; Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Army Staff(CoAS) General Upendra Dwivedi, Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary of MoD, and other senior officials of MoD and BEL,were present at the flagging-off ceremony.

About SANJAY:

i.An automated system called SANJAY combines the data from all battlefield sensors, both aerial and ground-based, processes it to ensure its accuracy, avoids duplication, and combines it to create a Common Surveillance Picture of the battlefield via the Army Data Network and Satellite Communication Network.

ii.It will improve battlefield transparency and reshape the future battlefield through a Centralised Web Application that will provide information to the Command and Army Headquarters, and the IA Decision Support System.

iii.The BSS is equipped with modern sensors and advanced analytics. It will be a force multiplier in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, monitor the broad land borders, stop invasions, and evaluate circumstances with unmatched accuracy.

- In a network-centric environment, this would allow commanders to conduct both conventional and non-conventional operations. Its implementation will be a significant step toward data and network centricity in IA.

iv.These systems will be implemented in three stages across all operational Brigades, Divisions, and Corps of IA from March 2025 to October of 2025, which has been declared as '**Year of Reforms**' by the MoD.

About Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL):

Chairman & Managing Director(**CMD**) -Manoj Jain

Headquarters – Bengaluru, Karnataka

Founded – 1954

India & UK Renew 5-Year Partnership to Strengthen Health Sectors

On January 23, 2025, **India** and the United Kingdom (**UK**) have renewed their health and life sciences partnership by signing a **five-year** Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) to strengthen collaboration and sharing knowledge in areas of mutual interest within health and life sciences during a ceremony held in New Delhi (Delhi).

- The primary focus of the renewed partnership is a shared vision for Universal Health Coverage.
- The partnership aims to tackle global health challenges such as Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), digital health innovations, and advancements in pharmaceuticals.

Key People: The ceremony was attended by Union Minister Jagat Prakash (**JP**) **Nadda**, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW); **Wes Streeting**, UK Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and **Lindy Cameron**, Acting High Commissioner of the UK to India

Focus Areas of the MoU:

- i.**Health systems, digital health interventions like telemedicine, public health and disease surveillance, and cybersecurity, including challenges and strategies to enhance resilience.
- ii.**To improve medical supply resilience to prevent and respond to future disruptions, while addressing regulatory issues, including the regulation and quality assurance of medicines, medical devices, and shared quality standards.
- iii.**Focusing on human resources for health, with an emphasis on education, training, and exchange in medical training, family medicine, and nursing.
- iv.**Health security focuses on cooperation and research on infectious diseases, emerging infections, and pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, including integrated surveillance across humans, animals, and plants.

About the United Kingdom (UK):

Prime Minister (**PM**) – Keir Starmer

Capital – London

Currency – The pound sterling, or Great Britain Pound (GBP)

About Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW):

Union Minister – Jagat Prakash (JP) Nadda (Rajya Sabha- Gujarat)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – Jadhav Prataprao Ganpatrao (Constituency- Buldhana, Maharashtra), Anupriya Patel (Constituency- Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh, UP)

BEE & TERI sign MoU to Establish CoEET in Hyderabad

On January 24 2025, The Bureau of Energy Efficiency(**BEE**), Ministry of Power(MoP) and The Energy and Resources Institute (**TERI**) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to launch a Centre of Excellence for Energy Transition(**CoEET**) at TERI's Institute of Energy Transition (IoET) in **Hyderabad**, Telangana.

- The project cost is estimated at **Rs.25 crore** under which BEE will provide a financial support of Rs.5 crore annually for 5 years for assisting in the establishment and functioning of the Centre.
- TERI will provide its existing **infrastructure** at its Hyderabad campus and will monitor the operational activities of the Centre.

i.The MoU was signed in the presence of Union Minister Manohar Lal, MoP and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs(MoHUA), and A. Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister(CM) of Telangana along with senior officials from the MoP, BEE, TERI, and the Telangana government in Hyderabad.

ii.The Government of India(GoI) has provided a budget of **Rs.488 crore** to **Telangana** for 9 new schemes under the Power System Development Fund(**PSDF**).

About Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE):

The Government established the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) on 1st March **2002** under the provisions of the **Energy Conservation Act, 2001**.

Director General(**DG**)– Srikant Nagulapalli

Headquarters– New Delhi, Delhi

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About Centre of Excellence for Energy Transition(CoEET):

i.The CoEET aims to conduct **research**, innovation, and capacity-building in energy transition technologies and policies by collaborating with corporates, industries, and academicians.

- The Centre will work with both national and international organizations to strengthen India's ability to address energy transition challenges and contribute to global sustainability goals.

ii.Its efforts will focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving **energy efficiency**, and accelerating the adoption of **low-carbon technologies** in sectors such as industries, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), buildings, transport, power, and mining.

iii.The Centre will also develop advanced **energy-saving** technologies like efficient motors, Heating, Ventilation and Air-Conditioning (HVAC) systems, smart manufacturing processes, and waste heat recovery solutions.

- Additionally, it will offer **policy** and **regulatory** support for building codes, energy performance standards, and appliance labeling.
- Circular economy practices, artificial intelligence, and real-time energy monitoring will be promoted to further drive sustainable progress.

Govt allocates Rs.488 crore for power projects in Telangana

The Government of India(GoI) has provided a budget of **Rs.488 crore** to **Telangana** for 9 new schemes under the Power System Development Fund(**PSDF**).

- The schemes will help to strengthen the power grid and adequate electricity supply across the state.

About Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE):

The Government established the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) on 1st March **2002** under the provisions of the **Energy Conservation Act, 2001**.

Director General(**DG**)– Srikant Nagulapalli

Headquarters– New Delhi, Delhi

About The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI):

Director General(**DG**)– Vibha Dhawan

Headquarters– New Delhi, Delhi

Founded– 1974

NIFT Hyderabad launches 'VisionNxt', fashion forecasting platform

In January 2025, the National Institute of Fashion Technology (**NIFT**), Hyderabad(Telangana) launched '**VisionNxt**', India's first fashion forecasting platform that combines Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Emotional Intelligence (EI). This was unveiled during NIFT's 40th Foundation Day celebrations in Hyderabad,

- i.**The platform, developed under the Ministry of Textiles (**MoT**), is designed to offer trend insights specifically for India's fashion and retail industry.
- ii.**VisionNxt aims to reduce India's dependency on international trend forecasting agencies by using India's strengths in Information Technology (IT) and textiles.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

GPI 2025 Military Strength Ranking: USA Tops, India Secures 4th Position

According to the 2025 Military Strength Ranking by the Global Firepower Index (**GPI**), India has secured 4th place as most powerful military in the world. The United States of America (USA) leads the ranking, followed by Russia in second place and China in third.

Note: These top four military powers—USA, Russia, China, and India—have consistently held their ranks since 2006.

About the Global Military Ranking:

The GPI 2025 evaluates the military capabilities of **145** countries based on more than **60** factors.

i.The factors include troop strength, military hardware, economic stability, geographic positioning across land, sea air and access to natural resources.

ii.The ranking assigns a Power Index (**PwrIndx**) score, where a score of **0.0000** is considered **perfect**. The system also accounts for smaller, technologically advanced nations, allowing them to compete with larger but less developed countries.

Key Points:

i.According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (**SIPRI**), based in Stockholm, Sweden, global military spending reached a record **USD 2.4 trillion** in 2023.

ii.According to Global Firepower Analysis(**GFA**) for defence allocation in 2025,the USA allocates the highest budget to its military, amounting to USD 895 billion. It is followed by China with a defense budget of USD 296 billion, Russia at USD 126 billion.

iii.**India's** defence allocation amounted to **USD 75 billion for the year 2025.**

Top 5 on 2025 Military Strength Ranking:

Rank	Country	PwrIndx
1	United States of America (USA)	0.0744
2	Russia	0.0788
3	China	0.0788
4	India	0.1184
5	South Korea	0.1656

Points to be Noted:

i.The top **ten** countries in the 2025 Military Strength Ranking **include** the United Kingdom (UK-6th), France (7th), Japan (8th), Turkey (9th), and Italy (10th). Pakistan dropped in the rankings, moving **from** 9th to **12th** place in global military spending.

ii.At the bottom of the list, **Bhutan** is ranked **145th** with a PwrIndx score of 6.3934. It is preceded by Benin with a score of 4.3156, the Central African Republic with 4.2347, Somalia with 4.2037, and Kosovo with 4.9141.

THE World University Rankings 2025 by Subjects: IISc Bengaluru Among Top 100 Institutes in CS

In January 2025, the Times Higher Education (THE) has released the ['World University Rankings by Subject 2025'](#). The Indian Institute of Science (**IISc**) in **Bengaluru**, Karnataka stands out as the only Indian institution in the **top 100** for Computer science (CS), securing the 99th position for the first time.

- Last year, IISc Bengaluru, was ranked in the 251-300 range and still led Indian universities in this field.

i.University of Oxford (the United Kingdom, UK) has topped among all universities followed by the University of Cambridge(UK), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology(the United States of America, USA).

ii.The rankings ranked over 11,000 universities across **11 subjects**, including arts, business, computer science(CS), engineering, law, life sciences, medical and health, physical sciences, psychology, and social sciences.

About Times Higher Education (THE):

Founded– 1971

Headquarters– London, United Kingdom (UK)

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The rankings ranked over 11,000 universities across **11 subjects**, including arts, business, computer science(CS), engineering, law, life sciences, medical and health, physical sciences, psychology, and social sciences.

Top institutions in World University Rankings 2025 by subject:

Subjects	Top institutions	Country
Arts and Humanities	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	United States of America(USA)
Business and Economics	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	USA
Computer Science	University of Oxford	United Kingdom(UK)
Education Studies	Stanford University	USA
Engineering	Harvard University	USA
Law	Stanford University	USA
Life Sciences	Harvard University	USA
Medical and Health	University of Oxford	UK
Physical Sciences	California Institute of Technology	USA
Psychology	Stanford University	USA
Social Sciences	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	USA

Highlights:

i. Globally, **USA universities** dominated the top 10 lists across all subjects, with Stanford University, Harvard University, and University of Cambridge are the only institutions represented in the top 10 across all 11 subjects.

- The USA also emerged as the most represented country in the rankings across all disciplines.

ii. No Asian universities topped any of the individual subjects. China and Singapore appear in the top 50s for all 11 subjects, Hong Kong is represented in 9 of them, and Japan appears for 8.

- Asia's best performance is in business and economics where **Peking University**, Beijing(China) and **Tsinghua University**(Beijing) both rose to take 4th and 6th place, respectively.

iii. The University of Hong Kong, both of these Chinese universities finished in the top 10 for education studies as well.

- Meanwhile, the National University of Singapore is in ninth position in engineering again and cracked the top 10 in physical sciences, the first institution from Asia to achieve this in 10th place.

Highlights for Indian Universities:

i.In computer science, **53** Indian universities have made it to the global top rankings, up from 47 in 2024, with IISc ranked 96th globally.

ii.In social sciences, **14** Indian institutions have kept their spots.

iii.This year, 24 Indian institutions made it to the top list in business and economics, from just 15 last year.

- Institutions like Amity University, Noida (Uttar Pradesh, UP); Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) University, Bhubaneswar (Odisha); University of Petroleum and Energy Studies (UPES), Dehradun (Uttarakhand) and Delhi University (DU), New Delhi (Delhi) secured places in the 401-500 band.

iv.For medical and health subjects, 28 Indian institutions have made it to the rankings.

- Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai (Tamil Nadu, TN) ranked in the 251-300 band.

v.Jadavpur University, Kolkata (West Bengal, WB) placed in the rankings for the first time, securing a place in the 601+ band.

Ranking of Indian Institutions:

Rank Range	Category	Name of the institute
99th	Computer Science	Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru
251-300	Computer Science	Anna University, Chennai
251-300	Medical and Health	Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences
301+	Law, Psychology	Delhi University (DU)
301-400	Computer Science	Lovely Professional University (LPU)
401-500	Social Sciences	Amity University, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), University of Petroleum and Energy Studies (UPES)
401-500	Arts and Humanities	Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University
601+	Arts and Humanities	Jadavpur University

About Times Higher Education (THE):

Founded- 1971

Headquarters- London, United Kingdom (UK)

UNCTAD Global Investment Trends Monitor 2024: FDI Rises 11%, Drops 8% Excluding European Flows

In January 2025, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (**UNCTAD**) reported in its [Global Investment Trends Monitor 2024](#) that global foreign direct investment (**FDI**) increased by **11%**, reaching an estimated **USD 1.4 trillion**. However, FDI declined by **8%** when excluding flows through European conduit economies.

- The decline in FDI poses a risk to the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which depend on international project financing.
- FDI in **India** grew by **13%**, with an increase in both the number and value of greenfield project announcements.
- The United States of America (USA) and India experienced significant growth in manufacturing projects, hitting record levels.
- In India, semiconductor and basic metals projects were key drivers of this increase.

About United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): Secretary-

General – Rebeca Grynspan

Headquarters – Geneva, Switzerland

Founded – 1964

In January 2025, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (**UNCTAD**) reported in its [Global Investment Trends Monitor 2024](#) that global foreign direct investment (**FDI**) increased by **11%**, reaching an estimated **USD 1.4 trillion in 2024**. However, FDI declined by **8%** when excluding flows through European conduit economies.

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FDI in **India** grew by **13%**, with an increase in both the number and value of greenfield project announcements.

Highlights of the report:

- i.** FDI in developing countries declined for the second consecutive year, dropping by 2%, in Central and West Asia as well as South America.
- ii.** FDI to developing **Asia** declined by **7%**, with China's inflows dropping 29% for the second consecutive year.
- iii.** Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) FDI rose 2% to a record USD 235 billion,
- iv.** Global investments in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)-related sectors fell by 11% in 2024, with a decline in the number of projects in agrifood systems, infrastructure, and water and sanitation compared to 2015.
- v.** In Europe, FDI dropped by 45% excluding conduit economies, with 18 of 27 member states experiencing declines. Notable decreases included Germany (-60%), Italy (-35%), Spain (-13%), and France (-6%).
- vi.** The United States of America (USA) and India experienced significant growth in manufacturing projects, hitting record levels.

In India, semiconductor and basic metals projects were key drivers of this increase.

Global trends:

- i.** Greenfield projects decreased by 8% in number and 7% in value, although investments in semiconductors and Artificial Intelligence (AI) showed growth from 2023.
- ii.** International project finance continued to decline, with the number of deals dropping by 31% and the value decreasing by 26%.
- iii.** Cross-border Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) activity declined by 13% in deal numbers, but total deal values rose by 2%, indicating a possible recovery from the past two years' decline.

Key points:

i. International project finance: Announcement of large-scale projects involving multiple investors, often with a significant debt component. These projects typically focus on infrastructure sectors, making them highly relevant for investments aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ii. Greenfield projects: Announcement-based data that reflect investment intentions for the reporting year, providing insight into future FDI trends. These projects primarily focus on industrial sectors.

iii. Cross-border M&As: Transactions that directly impact FDI flows by involving the acquisition or merging of companies across national borders.

About United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD):

Secretary-General – Rebeca Grynspan

Headquarters – Geneva, Switzerland

Founded – 1964

BANKING & FINANCE

TATA AIG Launches 'CyberEdge' to Offer Cyber Insurance for Indian Businesses

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based TATA AIG General Insurance Company Limited (**TATA AIG**) launched '**CyberEdge**', an innovative cyber insurance solution aimed at safeguarding businesses of all sizes from a broad range of cyber risks.

- It offers comprehensive financial and operational support, including coverage for forensic investigations, legal fees, data recovery, extortion payments, and losses incurred from business interruptions.

Features of CyberEdge:

i.First Response Cover: It provides the insured with 24/7 access to Tata AIG's team of incident response experts during a cyber incident. The service ensures top-tier legal and Information technology (IT) forensics within 2 hours of contacting the dedicated hotline, addressing the critical first 24 hours.

ii.Bricking Recovery Expenses: It cover the costs of replacing damaged equipment and helps restore normal business operations if a cyber incident makes your computer system inoperable.

iii.Comprehensive network loss calculation: It allows clients to choose between gross or net profit, depending on what best suits their business. The policy also covers the professional fees of a third-party forensic accounting firm to calculate the covered loss.

iv.Wider computer system protection: Covers BYOD (Bring Your Own Device), Operational Technology (OT) systems, industrial control systems, and Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) systems.

v.Network Interruption coverage: It covers disruptions for up to 120 days after an incident, including proactive mitigation costs.

vi.Other protection: It covers security and system failures, including voluntary or regulatory shutdowns, as well as protection for multimedia activities.

Points to Note:

i.The Indian cyber insurance market was valued at **Rs.850 crore** in 2024 and is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of **25%** from 2025 to 2030.

ii. According to Prahar's report, titled 'The Invisible Hand', India could experience up to 1 trillion cyberattacks annually by 2033, rising to 17 trillion by 2047.

About TATA AIG General Insurance Company Limited:

Managing Director(**MD**) Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Amit Ganorkar

Headquarters – Mumbai (Maharashtra)

Founded – 2001

RBI Cancels Registration of X10 Financial Services

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) cancelled the Certificate of Registration (**CoR**) of Mumbai(Maharashtra)-based **X10 Financial Services Limited** (formerly Abhishek Securities Limited), a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC), due to irregularities in its digital lending operations.

- As a result, the company is no longer allowed to operate as an NBFC.

i.The company **violated guidelines** related to **outsourcing financial services** by allowing external service providers (SPs) to handle key tasks such as credit appraisal, setting interest rates, and Know Your Customer (KYC) verification.

ii.The company had been offering loans through several mobile applications (apps), including Wecash Technology, XNP Technology, Yarlung Technology, Xinrui International, Omelette Technology, Mad-Elephant Network Technology, and Huidatech Technology.

Tata AIA Life Insurance Introduced 'Shubh Muhurat' to Simplify Wedding Savings

In January 2025, Mumbai, Maharashtra based **Tata AIA Life Insurance** launched '**Shubh Muhurat,**' a life insurance solution to help families prepare financially for weddings. The plan aims to address the rising costs of weddings by combining disciplined savings, asset growth, and financial security.

i.According to a report by New York, United States(US) based **Jefferies Group LLC**, India's wedding industry is the **second largest** in the world, which hosted over 80 lakh marriages in 2024, with expenses surpassing Rs 10.7 lakh crore. The average wedding cost of Rs 12.5 lakh which is twice as much as the expenditure from preschool to Graduation.

ii.It aims to reduce the financial burden on parents between the ages of **31-50** with children between 1-20 years by offering '**Shubh Muhurat,**' life insurance policy.

iii.The funds are legally protected under the Married Women's Property Act (**MWPA**).

iv.The benefit protection rider on the policy waives future premiums and ensures that nominees will receive maturity benefits in the event of the policyholder's death. This guarantees that the family won't experience financial hardship as the wedding plans proceed.

JK Tyre Receives USD 100 Million Sustainability-Linked Loan from IFC

In January 2025, Washington, United States(US) based International Finance Corporation (IFC) sanctioned a **USD 100 million** Sustainability-Linked Loan (**SLL**) to New Delhi based **JK Tyre**, a leading Indian tyre manufacturer with a global presence.

- The funding includes **USD 30 million** for **JK Tyre & Industries Limited** and up to **USD 70 million** for Cavendish Industries Limited (**CIL**), a subsidiary of JK Tyre. JK Tyre is a flagship company of JK Organisation, a global conglomerate.

i.Using the funds, the company will increase the capacity of its passenger car radial (PCR) tyres at Banmore plant in Madhya Pradesh (MP). Additionally, the funds would be used to increase the capacity of CIL's Laksar factory in

Uttarakhand to produce truck and bus radials (TBR).

ii.The initiative aims to boost local supply chains, encourage the development of energy-efficient tyre production, and create employment.

HDFC Life Tie-Up with CARS24 Financial Services for Life Insurance Distribution

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **HDFC Life** Insurance Company Limited entered into a corporate agency partnership with Gurugram (Haryana) based **CARS24 Financial Services Private Limited** (Part of CARS24 group), a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) registered with Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).

- This partnership will allow CARS24 Financial Services to offer HDFC Life's products to its current and potential customers.

i.The agreement will enable Insure24, the insurance vertical of the Cars24 Financial Services, to distribute HDFC's life insurance products on Cars24's online platform and its physical outlets across India.

ii.This initiative will play a key role in advancing the broader goal of achieving '**Insurance for All by 2047.**'

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

Micheal Martin elected as PM of Ireland

On 23 January 2025, **Micheal Martin**, leader of the Fianna Fail party, was elected as the Prime Minister (**PM**) of **Ireland** for a second term. He received 95 votes out of 171 votes in the parliament. He will serve as the PM of Ireland until November 2027.

- He previously served as PM of Ireland from 2020 to 2022.

Key Points:

- i.Micheal Martin** will lead a coalition government that comprises Fianna Fail party, their historic rival Fine Gael Party, and independent parliamentarians.
- ii.**This marks the second consecutive coalition between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, replacing the Green Party in government.
- iii.Simon Harris** of Fine Gael will become the PM of Ireland in 2027, he is expected to become Foreign Minister after succeeding Micheal Martin as Deputy PM under the coalition agreement.

About Micheal Martin:

- i.**Micheal Martin was a history teacher before entering into politics.
 - ii.**He was first elected in 1989 to the constituency of Cork South Central, Ireland.
 - iii.**He was a senior member of the Fianna Fail government that signed up for the European Union (EU)/International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout in 2010.
- Despite the significant losses Fianna Fail suffered in the 2011 elections following the EU/IMF bailout, Martin led the party's recovery, guiding Fianna Fail back into power nine years later.
- iv.**He has held several ministerial positions, including health, trade and education.

About Ireland:

President – Michael Daniel Higgins

Capital – Dublin

Currency – Euro(EUR)

Janet E. Petro, 1st Woman appointed as 15th Acting Administrator of NASA

On January 20 2025, **Janet E. Petro** was appointed as the 15th **Acting Administrator** of National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA) by the President of the United States of America (USA) **Donald John Trump**. She became the 1st woman to lead NASA since its founding in 1958 and replaced the 14th NASA administrator, **Bill Nelson**.

- Currently, she also serves as the **11th Director** of NASA's John F. Kennedy Space Center (KSC, originally known as the NASA Launch Operations Center) in Florida, USA, and was the 1st woman to hold this position.

About Janet E. Petro:

i. **Janet E. Petro** is an American Engineer and civil servant known for her impactful career in space exploration and aviation.

ii. In 2000, she joined NASA and served as the Deputy Director at the John F. Kennedy Space Center, USA, a position she held until 2019.

iii. In 2018, she was selected by the Florida Governor to be inducted into the 'Florida Women's Hall of Fame'.

iv. She also served a 12-month appointment as the Deputy Associate Administrator and Acting Director of NASA for the Office of Evaluation.

v. On June 30, 2021, she was appointed as the 11th Director of the John F. Kennedy Space Center, USA by the 14th NASA administrator, Bill Nelson

About National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA):

Headquarters– Washington, District of Columbia (DC), USA

Established– 29 July 1958

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

GalaxEye Space Solutions Private Limited deploys GLX-SQ payload aboard ISRO's PSLV POEM

On January 23, 2025, Chennai (Tamil Nadu TN) based startup GalaxEye Space Solutions Private Limited successfully deployed its **GLX-SQ** payload aboard the Indian Space Research Organisation's (**ISRO**) Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) Orbital Experimental Module-4 (POEM-4), which was launched on December 30, 2024.

- This mission marks the **world's 1st-ever** integration of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and optical imagery in orbit.
- This first-of-its-kind integration of SAR and optical imagery addresses critical needs in sectors such as defence, agriculture, and disaster response.

Key Points:

i.The GLX-SQ payload is designed to generate, capture, and process **SAR images** in space, completing all image processing and compression within **10 minutes**.

ii.By reducing **400 megabytes** (MB) of raw data to under 1.5 MB, it ensures efficient data transmission and minimizes communication challenges.

- This fast-paced processing capability underscores the company's cutting-edge approach to real-time data acquisition and management in space.

iii.SAR can capture detailed images even through clouds and darkness, providing valuable insights where traditional optical imagery would fall short.

- This combination enhances Earth observation by offering more reliable and actionable data, in challenging conditions.

iv.The GLX-SQ payload was part of ISRO's POEM initiative, which repurposes the 4th stage of the PSLV rocket to carry and support experimental payloads.

Note: GalaxEye is also gearing up for its flagship mission, '**Mission Drishti**', a multi-sensor satellite designed to deliver all-weather, high-resolution imaging, further establishing the company as a leader in the future of remote sensing and satellite technology.

About GalaxEye Space Solutions Private Limited:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Suyash Singh

Headquarters- Chennai, TN

Incorporated- 21 May 2021

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO):

Chairman- V Narayanan

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established- August 15, 1969

IMPORTANT DAYS

National Voters' Day 2025 – January 25

National Voters' Day (**NVD**) is observed annually across India on **25th January** commemorating the foundation of the Election Commission of India (ECI) in **1950**. The day aims to raise awareness about the importance of voting and to encourage active participation in the electoral process and to promote voter registration, especially among the youth.

- 25th January 2025 marks the observance of the **15th** National Voters' Day and also marks the celebration of **75 years** of service of ECI.
- The theme of NVD 2025 is "Nothing Like Voting, I Vote For Sure", a continuation of the 2024 theme.

Background:

- i. The 1st-ever NVD was celebrated in 2011 to mark the foundation day of the ECI.
- ii. The NVD was approved during a Cabinet meeting, with Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister (PM) of India in 2011.

2025 Events:

On January 25th, 2025, the ECI hosted a National event in New Delhi (Delhi) with President **Droupadi Murmu** as the Chief Guest and Union Minister, Arjun Ram Meghwal, Ministry of State (MoS), Ministry of Law and Justice (MoL&J), as the Guest of Honour.

- An ECI publication "Belief in the Ballot: Human stories shaping India's 2024 elections" was presented to President Droupadi Murmu, during the event.

About Election Commission of India (ECI):

Chief Election Commissioner (**CEC**) – Rajiv Kumar

Election Commissioner (**EC**)– Gyanesh Kumar ; Sukhbir Singh Sandhu

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 1950

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- The theme of NVD 2025 is "**Nothing Like Voting, I Vote For Sure**", a continuation of the 2024 theme.

Background:

i.The 1st-ever NVD was celebrated in 2011 to mark the foundation day of the ECI.

- ECI is a permanent Constitutional Body, established on 25 January 1950 by the Constitution of India.

ii.The NVD was approved during a Cabinet meeting, with Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister (PM) of India in 2011.

Points to Note:

i.The right to vote is enshrined in Article 326 of the Indian Constitution, recognizing it as a fundamental right for eligible citizens.

ii.The 61st Amendment of the Constitution of India (Constitution (61st Amendment) Act, 1989), lowered the minimum voting age from **21 to 18 years** for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

Significance:

- i. The day focuses on enrolling new voters and distributing voter identity cards, known as Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC).
- ii. The day motivates 1st-time voters to participate in the electoral process by registering to vote and obtaining their voter identity (ID) cards.

2025 Events:

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- This year's 2025 celebration follows the historic and successful conduct of the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, hailed as the largest democratic exercise in history.
- The event, celebrating the voters of India assumes a grand scale this year 2025 that India's total electorate was approaching 100 crore mark.

Best Electoral Practices Awards 2024:

President Murmu presented the 'Best Electoral Practices Awards for 2024', recognizing outstanding performances by state and district officers in various aspects of election management including innovations in outreach, technology, and voter accessibility.

- Awards were also given to government departments and media organizations that contributed to voter awareness campaigns.

Other Highlights:

i.The 1st copy of the **ECI Coffee Table Book** titled "India Votes 2024: A saga of democracy" was presented to the President Droupadi Murmu by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar.

- The publication is a tribute to every voter, election official, security personnel and all the stakeholders who contributed to the success of the 18th Lok Sabha elections.

ii.A short clip of the upcoming docu-drama series "**India Decides**" produced by Warner Bros Discovery was released at the event.

- The 3-part series dives deep into the history and making of the largest elections in the world.

iii.An ECI publication "Belief in the Ballot: Human stories shaping India's 2024 elections" was presented to President Droupadi Murmu.

- The book is a curated set of human interest stories that set these elections apart.

iv. Multimedia Exhibition: A multimedia exhibition was showcased, highlighting the key aspects of the 2024 elections with interactive and immersive experiences.

v. International Conference:The 2-day International Conference titled "Global Election Year 2024: Reiteration of Democratic Spaces" was held in New Delhi (Delhi) India and was hosted by the Election Commission (EC) on the occasion of NVD.

- The aim of the conference was to deliberate on common concerns related to electoral integrity, including the challenges posed by misinformation.
- It sought to address and discuss strategies to safeguard democratic processes, especially in the context of the upcoming elections in 2024.

Key People: Representatives from ECs and Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of countries including Mauritius, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Namibia, Indonesia, Russia, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Tunisia, Ireland, and Georgia attended the International Conference.

Note:

i.The electoral database has reached 99.1 crore in January 2024, with a youthful and balanced representation of genders.

- There are 21.7 crore young voters in the 18-29 age group.

ii.The Electoral Gender Ratio was improved by 6 points, increasing from 948 in 2024 to **954 in 2025.**

About Election Commission of India (ECI):

Chief Election Commissioner (**CEC**) – Rajiv Kumar

Election Commissioner (**EC**)– Gyanesh Kumar ; Sukhbir Singh Sandhu

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 1950

National Tourism Day 2025 – January 25

National Tourism Day is observed annually across India on **January 25** to highlight the significance of tourism in India's economy. The day emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural heritage and promoting various tourist destinations across India.

- The theme for National Tourism Day 2025 is "**Tourism for Inclusive Growth**".
- This theme aligns with India's broader tourism vision, **Maha Kumbh Mela**, one of the world's largest religious gatherings, being held from January 13 to February 26, 2024, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Background:

i. On January 25, 1949, the Government of India (GoI) instituted this day as a National Tourism Day, marking the formation of the Ministry of Tourism (MoT).

ii. The Tourist Traffic Committee established in 1948 initiated the celebration of "National Tourism Day" to promote tourism in India.

About Ministry of Tourism (MoT):

Union Minister – Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (Constituency – Jodhpur, Rajasthan)

Minister of State (MoS) – Suresh Gopi (Constituency – Thrissur, Kerala)

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i. On January 25, 1949, the Government of India (GoI) instituted this day as a National Tourism Day, marking the formation of the Ministry of Tourism (MoT).

- The Tourist Traffic Committee established in 1948 initiated the celebration of "National Tourism Day" to promote tourism in India.

iii. The day highlights the importance of tourism in driving India's growth, a vision formalized in **1982** to promote tourism.

Significance:

i. Sustainability in Tourism: It promotes responsible tourism and sustainable practices, focusing on environmental preservation and heritage conservation.

ii. Economic Impact: Tourism is a key driver of India's economy, supporting employment and infrastructure development.

iii. Cultural Promotion: The day celebrates India's unique traditions, languages, and cuisines on a global platform.

Government Initiatives :

i.Travel for LiFE Program: Launched in 2023, focuses on promoting sustainable tourism practices and encourages eco-friendly travel and responsible behavior among travelers and businesses.

ii.Swadesh Darshan Scheme: Launched in 2014-15 to develop theme-based tourism circuits, including:

- 'Eco Circuit' which promotes sustainable tourism infrastructure.
- 'Buddhist, Coastal, and Wildlife Circuits' that enhance visitor experiences with improved infrastructure and cohesive storytelling.

iii.PRASAD Scheme: The Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) launched in 2014-15, focuses on the development and rejuvenation of iconic pilgrimage sites like Varanasi, Amritsar, and Puri, with improved infrastructure and amenities

iv.Incredible India Campaign 2.0: A digital marketing campaign was launched in 2017 to promote India as a top tourist destination which targets adventure, luxury, wellness, and cultural tourism for both domestic and international audiences.

Facts about Indian Tourism:

i.India has 43 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) World Heritage Sites, with the latest addition of Moidams, the burial system of the Ahom Dynasty in Assam.

ii.The Chenab Bridge in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), is the world's highest rail bridge, 35 meters (m) higher than the Eiffel Tower, France at 1,315 m long.

iii.Kangra Fort in Himachal Pradesh (HP) was the oldest fort in India, dating back around 3,500 years.

iv.India boasts over 550 wildlife sanctuaries, with **Ranthambore National Park**, Rajasthan being the largest.

v.Mawlynnong, in Meghalaya, is known as **Asia's cleanest village** and offers a stunning and pristine location in Northeast India.

vi.Kumbh Mela holds the title of the largest peaceful gathering in the world.

Points to Note:

i.As per the World Economic Forum 2024, India is ranked **39th** out of 119 countries in the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI).

ii.The United Nations (UN's) **World Tourism Day** is observed annually on September 27 globally to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Statutes in 1970.

About Ministry of Tourism (MoT):

Union Minister – Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (Constituency – Jodhpur, Rajasthan)

Minister of State (**MoS**) – Suresh Gopi (Constituency – Thrissur, Kerala)

28th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Dr. Arvind Panagariya Launched NITI Aayog's Inaugural FHI 2025 ; Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Goa Top 3 Performing States

In January 2025, **Dr. Arvind Panagariya**, Chairman of 16th Finance Commission (FC) launched the inaugural issue of National Institution for Transforming India (**NITI**) Aayog's report titled '[Fiscal Health Index \(FHI\) 2025 for the Financial Year 2022-23 \(FY23\)](#)' in New Delhi, Delhi.

- As per the report, **Odisha** has outperformed all other states with cumulative score of **67.8** out of 100, followed by Chhattisgarh (55.2) and Goa (53.6).

i.The report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the fiscal health of **18** major Indian states that drive the Indian economy in terms of their contribution to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), demography, total expenditure, revenues, and overall fiscal stability.

ii.The report ranked states based on 5 key sub-indices such as: Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilisation, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability.

About National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – B.V.R. Subrahmanyam

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established in- 2015

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- As per the report, **Odisha** has outperformed all other states with cumulative score of **67.8** out of 100, followed by Chhattisgarh (55.2) and Goa (53.6).
- The report mentioned that Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Goa and Gujarat have consistently been the top-performing states across time periods considered in the study.

About Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2025:

i.The report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the fiscal health of **18** major Indian states that drive the Indian economy in terms of their contribution to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), demography, total expenditure, revenues, and overall fiscal stability.

- It also provides in-depth information about state-specific challenges and areas for improvement.

ii.The report ranked states based on 5 key sub-indices such as: Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilisation, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability.

iii.The report has sourced data from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India to calculate the FHI of states.

Classification of States:

i.The report has classified the states into **4** main categories based on their composite score: Achiever(FHI Score>50), Front Runner(FHI Score: 40-50), Performer(FHI Score:25-40) and Aspirational(FHI Score ≤25).

ii.States in Achiever category: Odisha (rank 1st), Chhattisgarh (2nd), Goa (3rd), Jharkhand(rank 4th with overall score of 51.6) and Gujarat (rank 5th overall score of 50.5).

- The report mentioned that these top 5 achiever states have higher capital outlay of up to **4%** of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), effective mobilization of non-tax revenue, are revenue surplus and have low interest payments, which is maximum 7% of revenue recipients.

iii.States in Front-runner category: Maharashtra (50.3); Uttar Pradesh (UP) (45.9); Telangana (43.6); Madhya Pradesh (MP) (42.2); and Karnataka (40.8)

- The report mentioned that front-runner states reported high total developmental expenditure of up to 73%, saw consistent growth in own tax revenue, had balanced fiscal management and improved debt sustainability with debt-to-GSDP ratio of 24%.

iv.States in Performer category: Tamil Nadu (TN) (29.2); Rajasthan (28.6); Bihar (27.8) and Haryana (27.4)

v.States in Aspirational category: Kerala (25.4), West Bengal (WB)(21.8), Andhra Pradesh (AP) (20.9) and Punjab (10.7)

- As per the report, states in this category are the worst performers with lowest composite FHI score compared to other states.
- It has also highlighted that these states are struggling to meet the fiscal and revenue deficit targets, have low revenue mobilization, increasing debt burden with debt sustainability a concern in these states.

Top 3 states in FHI 2025:

Category	Top 3 States
Achiever	1.Odisha 2.Chhattisgarh 3.Goa
Front-runner	1.Maharashtra 2.Uttar Pradesh (UP) 3.Telangana
Performer	1.Tamil Nadu (TN) 2.Rajasthan 3.Bihar
Aspirational	1.Kerala 2.West Bengal (WB) 3.Andhra Pradesh (AP)

Key Findings:

i. Among the 5 key sub-indices of the report, **Odisha** has topped the debt index (**99.0**) and debt sustainability (**64.0**) rankings with better than average scores under Quality of Expenditure (52) and Revenue Mobilisation (69.9).

- The report outlined certain factors responsible for good fiscal health of state Odisha are: low fiscal deficits, a good debt profile, and an above average capital outlay or GSDP ratio.

ii. According to the report, **Jharkhand** has shown improvement in its fiscal health. It has improved its ranking from 10th position (in the period of 2015-19 to 2021-22) to **4th** position (in 2022-23).

- This improvement is mainly attributed to better revenue mobilization, enhanced fiscal prudence, and stronger debt sustainability.

iii. The report observed that most South Indian states have performed poor in managing their finances. It has specifically highlighted 3 southern states i.e. **AP, Kerala** and **TN**, which have performed worse in the rankings as they scored below 30 out of 100.

- Also, Karnataka witnessed a drop in its rankings, from 3rd (in 2014-15 to 2021-22) to 10th (in the period of 2015-19 to 2021-22), mainly due to subdued performance under Quality of Expenditure and Debt Sustainability.

iv. The report noted that among states placed in 'aspirational' category, Kerala and Punjab struggled with low quality of expenditure and debt sustainability while, WB faces revenue mobilization and debt index issues.

- It further highlighted AP has high fiscal deficit and Haryana has a poor debt profile.

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Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 2015

Uttarakhand, 1st State to Implement Uniform Civil Code

Uttarakhand has become the **1st state** in India to implement the Uniform Civil Code(**UCC**), which came into effect on **27 January 2025**. Uttarakhand Chief Minister(CM) Pushkar Singh Dhami launched the **UCC portal** and issued a notification marking the adoption of the civil code at an event in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

- The UCC aims to unify personal laws related to marriage, divorce, succession, and inheritance, ensuring equality for all citizens, excluding those from Scheduled Tribes (ST).

Background:

i.On February 7, 2024, the Legislative Assembly of the state of Uttarakhand passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill.

ii.On March 13, the bill was granted assent by President Droupadi Murmu to establish a uniform and equal set of rules on personal status law, including marriage, divorce, succession, and inheritance, that applies to all citizens of the state irrespective of religion.

About Uttarakhand:

Chief Minister (**CM**)– Pushkar Singh Dhami

Governor- Gurmit Singh

Capital- Dehradun

Dams- Tehri Dam, Tumaria Dam, Maneri Dam

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Background:

- i.** On February 7, 2024, the Legislative Assembly of the state of Uttarakhand passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill.
- ii.** On March 13, the bill was granted assent by President Droupadi Murmu to establish a uniform and equal set of rules on personal status law, including marriage, divorce, succession, and inheritance, that applies to all citizens of the state irrespective of religion.
- iii.** The Uttarakhand government introduced the Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code Act, 2024, which provides a clear process for creating and canceling wills and related documents called codicils under the rules of inheritance.
- iv.** This law applies throughout the state of Uttarakhand and is also effective on the residents of the state living outside Uttarakhand.

About UCC:

- i.** The UCC is a proposed framework aimed at creating a set of personal laws that apply equally to all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs.
- ii.** At present, personal laws related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, and maintenance are governed by the religious customs and scriptures of different communities.

Features of the UCC:

The bill is divided into **four parts**: Part 1: Marriage and Divorce, Part 2: Succession, Part 3: Live-In Relationship, and Part 4: Miscellaneous. Each part is subdivided further into chapters. Some of the major features are as follows:

- Section 4 addresses conditions of marriage, one of which is that "neither party has a spouse living at the time of the marriage," and requires a marriage age of 21 for a man and 18 for a woman effectively abolishing polygamy and child marriage. The code also requires compulsory registration of marriages within 60 days.
- Under section 25, both parties are granted an equal right to petition the court to dissolve the marriage through a decree of divorce, and divorce can occur only through court proceedings.
- Section 29 emphasizes that marriages can be dissolved only under the provisions of the code, "notwithstanding any usage, custom, tradition, [or] personal law of any party to the marriage."

ii.Registration Process: Sub-registrar must make a decision on marriage registration within **15 days** of receiving an application.

- Marriages must be registered within 60 days of solemnization.
- Marriages conducted before March 26, 2010, or outside Uttarakhand, can be registered within 6 months of the Act's implementation, if they meet legal criteria.

Key Points:

i.Article 44 of the Indian Constitution advocates for the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) across India.

ii.Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP): UCC is part of the DPSP **Part IV** (Articles 36–51), which guides the government in formulating policies.

iii.DPSPs are not legally enforceable by courts (Article 37), meaning the government is expected to work toward them but is not legally bound to implement them immediately.

Note: Currently, **Goa** remains the only state in India with an existing **civil code**, introduced during the Portuguese colonial period.

About Uttarakhand:

Chief Minister (CM)– Pushkar Singh Dhami

Governor– Gurmit Singh

Capital– Dehradun

Dams– Tehri Dam, Tumaria Dam, Maneri Dam

DGS & C-DAC partner to enhance Maritime Innovation

On January 25 2025, the Directorate General of Shipping (**DGS**) under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways(MoPSW) and the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (**C-DAC**), a Scientific Society under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) to enhance **innovation** in technology and excellence in India's **maritime sector** through advancing maritime administration by latest technologies.

- The MoU was signed by Shyam Jagannathan, Director General(DG) of Shipping and Magesh Ethirajan, Director General (DG) C-DAC in the presence of. S. Krishnan, Secretary, MeitY.

Key People:

The event was also attended by Abhishek Singh, Additional Secretary, MeitY, Sanket S Bhondve, Joint Secretary, MeitY, Sunita Verma, Scientist G & Group Coordinator, MeitY, Savita Utreja, Scientist G, Group Coordinator (Cyber Security) and other Senior officers from MeitY, DG Shipping and C-DAC.

Key Areas of Collaboration

The MoU will involve the integration of C-DAC's expertise in advanced computing, cybersecurity, Blockchain and e-Governance in various areas,

i.Digitalization and Automation of Maritime Processes: Usage of advanced digital tools and automated systems to simplify the operations and increase efficiency.

ii.Maritime Data Analytics and Predictive Modeling: Advanced data analytics will be used to get deeper understanding of patterns and trends for effective decision-making.

- Predictive modelling will help in identifying possible risks and optimizing operations for a secure maritime ecosystem.

iii.Cybersecurity and Maritime IoT: Cybersecurity systems will be strengthened and critical data from cyber threats will be secured by integrating Internet of Things (IoT) technologies in maritime operations.

iv.Maritime Education and Training: Advanced education and training will be provided to the industry professionals to equip them with the necessary skills required for rapidly changing technological situations.

v.Research and Development in Maritime Technologies: The MoU would also promote research and development (R&D) to enhance innovation in areas like high-performance computing, blockchain, and e-Governance.

About Directorate General of Shipping (DGS):

Director General(DG)- Shyam Jagannathan

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Founded- 1949

About Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC):

Director General(DG)– Magesh Ethirajan

Headquarters -Pune, Maharashtra

Founded- 1988

IIA Organizes International Conference in Bengaluru to Mark 125th Anniversary of KSO

In January 2025, The Indian Institute of Astrophysics (**IIA**), an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Science and Technology (MoS&T), organized an **international conference** on the theme, '**Sun, Space Weather, and Solar-Stellar Connections**' to mark the **125th** anniversary of the Kodaikanal Solar Observatory (**KSO**), from January 20-25, 2025 in Bengaluru(Karnataka).

- i.**The conference features a well-designed scientific program created by 20 eminent solar astronomers, supported by the Solar Physics group of IIA.
- ii.**Discussions focus on themes like solar magnetism, energetic solar phenomena, and the heliosphere. The program also highlights new developments in solar astronomy, including the proposed National Large Solar Telescope in Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh.

- Over 200 solar physicists from India and other countries have come together for discussions.

Note: The Kodaikanal Solar Observatory, a part of the IIA and established in **1899**, has made significant contributions to solar research.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Wetland City Accreditation: Indore & Udaipur became India's first Ramsar wetland cities

In January 2025, an independent Advisory Committee on Wetland City Accreditation (WCA) of the Ramsar Convention, announced the list of [31 newly accredited Wetland Cities](#), during its 64th meeting held in Gland, Switzerland. Among the newly accredited cities, **Indore** (Madhya Pradesh, MP) and **Udaipur** (Rajasthan) became the **first two Indian** cities to receive the international accreditation as 'Wetland Cities' under Ramsar Convention.

- With this, the **total number** of accredited Wetland Cities has reached **74**.

i. This accreditation was granted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) under the Ramsar Convention.

- It is valid for 6 years to promote the conservation and sustainable use of urban wetlands, ensuring ecological and socio-economic benefits for local populations.

ii. In December 2024, the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India (GoI), **nominated** three Indian cities: Indore, Udaipur, and Bhopal (MP).

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Background:

In December 2024, the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (**MoEF&CC**), Government of India (GoI), **nominated** three Indian cities: Indore, Udaipur, and Bhopal (MP).

- **Indore:** It is the cleanest city in India and the recipient of India's Smart City Award 2023 for its best sanitation, water and urban environment. Sirpur Lake, a Ramsar Site in the city, has been recognised as an important site for water bird congregation and is being developed as a Bird Sanctuary.
- **Udaipur:** It is known as the City of Lakes, is surrounded by five significant wetlands: Pichola, Fateh Sagar, Rang Sagar, Swaroop Sagar, and Doodh Talai, which are vital to its ecological balance.
- **Bhopal:** One of the cleanest cities in India that has proposed conservation zones around the wetlands in its draft City Development Plan 2031. Bhoj Wetland, Ramsar Site is Bhopal's lifeline, equipped with the world-class wetlands interpretation centre, Jal Tarang.

About Wetland City Accreditation(WCA):

i.The WCA is a voluntary accreditation system established by the Ramsar Convention during the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) 12 in 2015 to recognize cities that have taken exceptional steps to safeguard their urban wetlands.

ii.The WCA awarded to cities that demonstrate a commitment to conserving and sustainably managing their wetlands.

- To qualify, cities must meet **six international criteria**, which include measures to protect wetland ecosystems and promote their sustainable use.

iii.China leads the global Wetland City list with 22 cities, followed by France with 9 cities.

About Ramsar Convention:

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty aimed at protecting and conserving wetlands and their resources. It was signed in **1971** in Ramsar, a city in Iran, and came into effect in **1975**.

i. This treaty is unique as it is the only international agreement focused on a single ecosystem. It has 172 member countries, including India.

ii. **India joined** the Ramsar Convention in **1982**. As of January 2025, India has a total of **85 wetlands** protected under this treaty.

Points to Note:

- The Amrit Dharohar Initiative launched by MoEF&CC to promote unique conservation values of the Ramsar Sites in India.
- Tamil Nadu(TN) has the highest number of Ramsar Sites in India with 18 Ramsar Sites.
- The World Wetlands Day(WWD) is annually observed across the globe on 2 February to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands for human prosperity and a healthy planet.

Recent Related News:

In December 2024, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO) unveiled a comprehensive roadmap marking the 20th anniversary of the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to make all coastal community tsunami ready by 2030. This initiative was announced during an international conference in Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

- Under the UNESCO Tsunami Ready Programme, over 30 countries have established critical early warning systems, with 26 Indian and 12 Indonesian coastal communities recognized as tsunami-ready. Globally, 700 million people reside in tsunami-prone areas, a figure projected to reach 1 billion by 2050.

BANKING & FINANCE

DFS Releases Rs 500 Crore Capital Infusion into IFCI through PREFER

In January 2025, Department of Financial Services (**DFS**) under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) has released **Rs 500 crore** capital infusion to New Delhi (Delhi) based **IFCI Limited** (formerly known as the Industrial Finance Corporation of India), a development finance institution (DFI) for subscribing to its share capital in the Financial Year 2024-25(FY25) through the Preferential Issue (PREF) of shares.

- This infusion is aimed at strengthening IFCI's financial health in preparation for its upcoming restructuring and consolidation into a larger group.

Background:

i.The capital infusion plan for IFCI was approved with the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for FY 25 in the Lok Sabha in December 2024.

- In January 2025, the DFS received approval from the President of India, Droupadi Murmu to release Rs. 500 crore to IFCI Ltd.

ii.With this infusion, the Government of India (GoI) is expected to increase its holding in the company beyond the current **71.72%** as of September 2024.

Preferential Issue (PREF):

A preferential issue is when a company issues shares or convertible securities to a specific group of investors, rather than through a public offering.

- This method is often used to raise capital and can involve offering shares to existing shareholders, venture capitalists, or strategic partners.

Note: In November 2024, MoF has given in-principle approval for the 'Consolidation of IFCI Group,' which involves the merger or amalgamation of IFCI Limited, Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited, and other group companies.

About IFCI Limited:

It is the first development financial institution (DFI) in India

Deputy Managing Director (**DMD**) – Rahul Bhawe

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Established – 1948

CheQ Launches 'CheQ Wisor', India's First AI-Powered Credit Card Expert

In January 2025, CheQ, a fintech company based in Bengaluru(Karnataka), introduced '**Cheq Wisor**', India's **first** Artificial Intelligence (**AI**)-powered **credit card expert**.

- Cheq Wisor **works** by using AI to provide instant, **human-like responses** to users' credit card questions through a simple chat interface, removing the need to search for information, and analyze expenses by category.

i.It is **designed to simplify credit card management**, making it easier for millions of Indians to manage their cards, earn rewards, and get personalized insights, all through an easy-to-use platform.

ii.It also offers a **Smart Spend Analysis** feature that compares spending across all credit cards and merchants in one view. This helps users track spending trends, understand monthly change.

Note: CheQ, founded by Aditya Soni in **2021**, has processed over USD 4 billion in credit card payments and served more than 3 million customers.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Padma Awards 2025: President approves 139 Padma Awards; List includes 7 Padma Vibhushan, 19 Padma Bhushan and 113 Padma Shri

On January 25 2025, Ministry of Home Affairs (**MHA**) announced the Padma Awards for 2025. The official list released comprises 7 Padma Vibhushan, 19 Padma Bhushan and 113 Padma Shri Awards.

Eminent Personalities honoured with the Padma Vibhushan:

- i. Justice (Retd.) **Jagdish Singh Khehar**, former Chief Justice of India (CJI), **Dr. D Nageshwar Reddy**, founder and chairman of (Hyderabad)Telangana-based AIG Hospitals. Former President, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Japan based Suzuki Motor Corporation (**SMC**), **Osamu Suzuki** conferred the Padma Vibhushan posthumously in 'trade and industry' category
- ii. Other distinguished personalities bestowed with Padma Vibhushan: famous Kathak dancer, Kumudini Rajnikant Lakhia from Gujarat; Renowned Malayalam writer and Jnanpith winner **MT Vasudevaan Nair** (Posthumous), from Kerala and **Sharda Sinha** (Posthumous), famous folk singer from Bihar.

Eminent Personalities honoured with Padma Bhushan:

- i. Renowned economist **Bibek Debroy** who served as Chairman of Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister (**EAC-PM**) and **Sushil Kumar Modi**, former Deputy Chief Minister (Dy CM) of Bihar; and **Manohar Joshi**, former CM of Maharashtra (from 1995-1999), were posthumously honoured with award.
- ii. Distinguished recipients of Padma Bhushan award include: famous Tamil Actor S. Ajith Kumar, Ghazal singer Pankaj Udhas (Posthumous), renowned filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, among others.

About Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA):

Union Minister- Amit Shah (Constituency- Gandhinagar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (MoS)- Nityanand Rai (Constituency- Ujiarpur, Bihar); Bandi Sanjay Kumar (Constituency- Karimnagar, Telangana)

On January 25 2025, the Ministry of Home Affairs (**MHA**) announced the Padma Awards for 2025. The official list released comprises 7 Padma Vibhushan, 19 Padma Bhushan and 113 Padma Shri Awards.

Padma Awards 2025:

i.Droupadi Murmu, the President of India has approved the conferment of **139** Padma Awards, including 1 duo case cases (in a duo case, the award is counted as one) for year 2025.

ii.Among the awardees, there are **23** women and the list also comprises **10** persons from the category of foreigners or Non-Resident Indians (NRI) or Person of Indian Origin (PIO) or Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) and **13** Posthumous awardees.

Padma Awards Committee:

i.Padma Awards are given based on recommendations made by the Padma Awards committee constituted by the Prime Minister(PM) annually. The nomination process is open to the public and even self- nomination is accepted.

ii.Padma Awards committee is chaired by Cabinet Secretary of India which includes members such as: Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and 4 to 6 eminent people.

- The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the PM and the President of India for final approval.
- At present, **T.V. Somanathan** is the cabinet secretary of India.

List of Padma Awards 2025

Padma Vibhushan(7):

S.NO.	Name	Field	State/Country
1.	Dr. Duvvur Nageshwar Reddy	Medicine	Telangana
2.	Justice (Retd.) Jagdish Singh Khehar	Public Affairs	Chandigarh
3.	Kumudini Rajnikant Lakhia	Art	Gujarat
4.	Lakshminarayana Subramaniam	Art	Karnataka
5.	M.T. Vasudevan Nair (Posthumous)	Literature and Education	Kerala
6.	Osamu Suzuki (Posthumous)	Trade and Industry	Japan
7.	Sharda Sinha (Posthumous)	Art	Bihar

Eminent Personalities honoured with the Padma Vibhushan:

i.Justice (Retd.) **Jagdish Singh Khehar**, former Chief Justice of India (CJI) is one of the Padma Vibhushan awardee for year 2025. He is also the 1st Sikh who served as 44th CJI between January 4, 2017 and August 27, 2017.

ii.**Dr. D Nageshwar Reddy**, founder and chairman of (Hyderabad)Telangana-based AIG Hospitals which was established as unit of Asian Institute of Gastroenterology, was honoured with Padma Vibhushan award for his exceptional contributions to public health, specifically in the field of gastroenterology.

- With this, he became the 1st medical doctor in India to be conferred with all Padma Awards i.e. Padma Shri (2002), Padma Bhushan (2016) and Padma Vibhushan (2025).

iii.Former President, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Japan based Suzuki Motor Corporation (**SMC**), **Osamu Suzuki** conferred the Padma Vibhushan posthumously in 'trade and industry' category for his outstanding contributions in promoting the growth of the Indian automobile sector.

iv.Other distinguished personalities bestowed with Padma Vibhushan: famous Kathak dancer, Kumudini Rajnikant Lakhia from Gujarat; Renowned Malayalam writer and Jnanpith winner **MT Vasudevaan Nair** (Posthumous), from Kerala and **Sharda Sinha** (Posthumous), famous folk singer from Bihar.

Padma Bhushan(19):

S.NO.	NAME	Field	State/Country
8.	A. Surya Prakash	Literature and Education- Journalism	Karnataka
9.	Anant Nag	Art	Karnataka
10.	Bibek Debroy (Posthumous)	Literature and Education- Journalism	National Capital Territory (NCT) Delhi
11.	Jatin Goswami	Art	Assam
12.	Jose Chacko Periappuram	Medicine	Kerala
13.	Kailash Nath Dikshit	Others- Archaeology	NCT Delhi
14.	Manohar Joshi (Posthumous)	Public Affairs	Maharashtra
15.	Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti	Trade and Industry	Tamil Nadu (TN)
16.	Nandamuri Balakrishna	Art	Andhra Pradesh (AP)
17.	Parattu Raveendran (P.R.) Sreejesh	Sports	Kerala

18.	Pankaj Patel	Trade and Industry	Gujarat
19.	Pankaj Udhas (Posthumous)	Art	Maharashtra
20.	Rambahadur Rai	Literature and Education- Journalism	Uttar Pradesh (UP)
21.	Sadhvi Ritambhara	Social Work	UP
22.	S. Ajith Kumar	Art	TN
23.	Shekhar Kapur	Art	Maharashtra
24.	Shobana Chandrakumar	Art	TN
25.	Sushil Kumar Modi (Posthumous)	Public Affairs	Bihar
26.	Vinod Dham	Science and Engineering	United States of America (USA)

Eminent Personalities honoured with Padma Bhushan:

i.PR Sreejesh, currently serving as the coach of the Indian men's junior hockey team is the only sportsperson to be honored with Padma Bhushan for year 2025 in recognition of his contributions to hockey in India.

- With this, he became only the 2nd Indian hockey player to be bestowed with Padma Bhushan after the legendary Major Dhyan Chand honoured with the award in 1956.

ii.Renowned economist **Bibek Debroy** who served as Chairman of Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister (**EAC-PM**) and **Sushil Kumar Modi**, former Deputy Chief Minister (Dy CM) of Bihar; and **Manohar Joshi**, former CM of Maharashtra (from 1995-1999), were posthumously honoured with award.

iii.Distinguished recipients of Padma Bhushan award include: famous Tamil Actor S. Ajith Kumar, Ghazal singer Pankaj Udhas (Posthumous), renowned filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, among others.

Padma Shri (113):

S.NO.	Name	Field	State/Country
27.	Adwaita Charan Gadnayak	Art	Odisha
28.	Achyut Ramchandra Palav	Art	Maharashtra
29.	Ajay V Bhatt	Science and Engineering	USA
30.	Anil Kumar Boro	Literature and Education	Assam
31.	Arijit Singh	Art	West Bengal (WB)
32.	Arundhati Bhattacharya	Trade and Industry	Maharashtra
33.	Arunoday Saha	Literature and Education	Tripura
34.	Arvind Sharma	Literature and Education	Canada
35.	Ashok Kumar Mahapatra	Medicine	Odisha

36.	Ashok Laxman Saraf	Art	Maharashtra
37.	Asutosh Sharma	Science and Engineering	UP
38.	Ashwini Bhide Deshpande	Art	Maharashtra
39.	Bajjnath Maharaj	Ohters-Spiritualism	Rajasthan
40.	Barry Godfray John	Art	NCT Delhi
41.	Begam Batool	Art	Rajasthan
42.	Bharat Gupt	Art	NCT Delhi
43.	Bheru Singh Chouhan	Art	Madhya Pradesh (MP)
44.	Bhim Singh Bhavesh	Social Work	Bihar
45.	Bhimavva Doddabalappa Shillekyathara	Art	Karnataka
46.	Budhendra Kumar Jain	Medicine	MP
47.	C S Vaidyanathan	Public Affairs	NCT Delhi
48.	Chaitram Deochand Pawar	Social Work	Maharashtra

49.	Chandrakant Sheth (Posthumous)	Literature and Education	Gujarat
50.	Chandrakant Sompura	Others- Architecture	Gujarat
51.	Chetan E. Chitnis	Science and Engineering	France
52.	David R Syiemlieh	Literature and Education	Meghalaya
53.	Durga Charan Ranbir	Art	Odisha
54.	Farooq Ahmad Mir	Art	Jammu & Kashmir (J&K)
55.	Ganeshwar Shastri Dravid	Literature and Education	UP
56.	Gita Upadhyay	Literature and Education	Assam
57.	Gokul Chandra Das	Art	WB

58.	Guruvayur Dorai	Art	TN
59.	Harchandan Singh Bhatta	Art	MP
60.	Hariman Sharma	Others- Agriculture	Himachal Pradesh (HP)
61.	Harjinder Singh Srinagar Wale	Art	Punjab
62.	Harvinder Singh	Sports	Haryana
63.	Hassan Raghu	Art	Karnataka
64.	Hemant Kumar	Medicine	Bihar
65.	Hriday Narayan Dixit	Literature and Education	UP
66.	Hugh and Colleen Gantzer (Posthumous) (Duo)	Literature and Education	Uttarakhand
67.	Inivalappil Mani (IM) Vijayan	Sports	Kerala
68.	Jagdish Joshila	Literature and Education	MP
69.	Jaspinder Narula	Art	Maharashtra

70.	Jonas Masetti	Others-Spiritualism	Brazil
71.	Joynacharan Bathari	Art	Assam
72.	Jumde Yomgam Gamlin	Social Work	Arunachal Pradesh (AR)
73.	K. Damodaran	Others-Culinary	TN
74.	K L Krishna	Literature and Education	Andhra Pradesh (AP)
75.	K Omanakutty Amma	Art	Kerala
76.	Kishore Kunal	Civil Service	Bihar
77.	L Hangthing	Others-Agriculture	Nagaland
78.	Lakshmipathy Ramasubbaiyer	Literature and Education-Journalism	TN
79.	Lalit Kumar Mangotra	Literature and Education	J&K

80.	Lama Lobzang (Posthumous)	Others-Spiritualism	Ladakh
81.	Libia Lobo Sardesai	Social Work	Goa
82.	M D Srinivas	Science and Engineering	TN
83.	Madugula Nagaphani Sarma	Art	AP
84.	Mahabir Nayak	Art	Jharkhand
85.	Mamata Shankar	Art	WB
86.	Manda Krishna Madiga	Public Affairs	Telangana
87.	Maruti Bhujangrao Chitampalli	Literature and Education	Maharashtra
88.	Miryala Apparao (Posthumous)	Art	AP
89.	Nagendra Nath Roy	Literature and Education	WB
90.	Narayan (Bhulai Bhai) (Posthumous)	Public Affairs	UP

91.	Naren Gurung	Art	Sikkim
92.	Neerja Bhatla	Medicine	NCT Delhi
93.	Nirmala Devi	Art	Bihar
94.	Nitin Nohria	Literature and Education	USA
95.	Onkar Singh Pahwa	Trade and Industry	Punjab
96.	P Datchanamoorthy	Art	Puducherry
97.	Pandi Ram Mandavi	Art	Chhattisgarh
98.	Parmar Lavjibhai Nagjibhai	Art	Gujarat
99.	Pawan Goenka	Trade and Industry	WB
100.	Prashanth Prakash	Trade and Industry	Karnataka
101.	Pratibha Satpathy	Literature and Education	Odisha
102.	Purisai Kannappa Sambandan	Art	TN
103.	Ravichandran Ashwin	Sports	TN

104.	R G Chandramogan	Trade and Industry	TN
105.	Radha Bahin Bhatt	Social Work	Uttarakhand
106.	Radhakrishnan Devasenapathy	Art	TN
107.	Ramdarash Mishra	Literature and Education	NCT Delhi
108.	Ranendra Bhanu Majumdar	Art	Maharashtra
109.	Ratan Kumar Parimoo	Art	Gujarat
110.	Reba Kanta Mahanta	Art	Assam
111.	Renthlei Lalrawna	Literature and Education	Mizoram
112.	Ricky Gyan Kej	Art	Karnataka
113.	Sajjan Bhajanka	Trade and Industry	WB
114.	Sally Holkar	Trade and Industry	MP

115.	Sant Ram Deswal	Literature and Education	Haryana
116.	Satyapal Singh	Sports	UP
117.	Seeni Viswanathan	Literature and Education	TN
118.	Sethuraman Panchanathan	Science and Engineering	USA
119.	Sheikha Ali Al-Jaber Al-Sabah	Medicine	Kuwait
120.	Sheen Kaaf Nizam (Shiv Kishan Bissa)	Literature and Education	Rajasthan
121.	Shyam Bihari Agrawal	Art	UP
122.	Soniya Nityanand	Medicine	UP
123.	Stephen Knapp	Literature and Education	USA

124.	Subhash Khetulal Sharma	Others- Agriculture	Maharashtra
125.	Suresh Harilal Soni	Social Work	Gujarat
126.	Surinder Kumar Vasal	Science and Engineering	Delhi
127.	Swami Pradiptananda (Kartik Maharaj)	Others- Spiritualism	WB
128.	Syed Ainul Hasan	Literature and Education	UP
129.	Tejendra Narayan Majumdar	Art	WB
130.	Thiyam Suryamukhi Devi	Art	Manipur
131.	Tushar Durgeshbhai Shukla	Literature and Education	Gujarat
132.	Vadiraj Raghawendracharya Panchamukhi	Literature and Education	AP
133.	Vasudeo Kamath	Art	Maharashtra
134.	Velu Aasaan	Art	TN
135.	Venkappa Ambaji Sugatekar	Art	Karnataka
136.	Vijay Nityanand Surishwar Ji Maharaj	Others- Spiritualism	Bihar
137.	Vijayalakshmi Deshamane	Medicine	Maharashtra
138.	Vilas Dangre	Medicine	Maharashtra
139.	Vinayak Lohani	Social Work	WB

Eminent Personalities who are honored with Padma Shri:

i. Former Indian off-spinner **Ravichandran Ashwin** is among 4 sports personalities to receive Padma Shri for year 2025. He is the second-highest wicket-taker for India in cricket with 765 scalps.

- Other sports personalities selected for the Padma Shri: IM Vijayan, former Captain of Indian Football team; Harvinder Singh, double Paralympic medalist; and Satyapal Singh, coach of the Indian Para-athletics team.

ii. Arunadhathi Bhattacharya, Chairperson and CEO of Salesforce has been named for this year PadmaShri award for her distinguished services in 'Trade and Industry' category.

- She was the 1st woman to chair India's largest Public Sector Bank (PSB), State Bank of India (**SBI**) from 2013 to 2017.

iii. This year total **12** distinguished personalities from North-East (NE) region have been selected for Padma Shri: L. Hangthing, a fruit farmer from Noklak, Nagaland, with over 30 years of experience of cultivating non-native fruits;

- Naren Gurung, famous folk artist from Gangtok (Sikkim) devoted 60 years to preserve and promote Sikkimese Nepali folk music and dance traditions;
- Jumde Yomgam Gamlin from AR, worked for de-addiction and social reform for local communities for last 30 years, among others.

iv. Other notable winners: P. Datchanamoorthy, an instrumentalist specializing in Thavil (a classical percussion instrument fundamental to South Indian music and culture); Jagdish Joshila, a renowned Nimadi and Hindi author from Khargone with experience of over 50 years; famous playback singer Arijit Singh and 3-time Grammy award-winning musician, Rickey Gyan Kei, among others.

Note: Among the states, Maharashtra received the highest number of Padma awards (14) for year 2025, followed by TN (13), UP (10), Karnataka and WB (9 each) and Gujarat and Bihar (8 each).

About Padma Awards:

i. Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian awards in India after "**Bharat Ratna**".

ii. Padma Awards are given in different fields of activities including art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature, education, sports, civil service, among others.

ii. Padma Awards are given in 3 different categories, namely, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri.

- **Padma Vibhushan:** is India's second- highest civilian honour and is given for exceptional and distinguished service.
- **Padma Bhushan:** is 3rd highest civilian award is given for distinguished service of high order.
- **Padma Shri:** is 4th highest civilian award and is given for distinguished service in any field.
- field.

Background of Padma Awards:

i. Government of India (GoI) established the Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan as two civilian honours in **1954**.

ii. Initially, Padma Vibhushan was classified in 3 different categories: Pahela Varg, Dusra Varg and Tisra Varg.

iii. Later, These 3 classes were renamed as Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri on **January 8, 1955** as per Presidential notification.

Note: These awards have been given annually since their inception, except in 1978, 1979 and 1993-1997.

Conferment of Awards:

- i.** Padma Awards are announced every year on Republic Day and its official ceremony held in Rashtrapati Bhavan tentatively in the month of March or April.
- ii.** The recipients receive a medallion made up of bronze but embossing on them is done with different metals and Sanad (Certificate) that is signed by the President.
- iii.** The total number of awards given in a year **should not exceed 120** which excludes awards given posthumously and awards to NRIs, foreigners and OCIs.
- iv.** The award cannot be added as a prefix or suffix to the recipient's name and is not equal to a title.

About Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA):

Union Minister- Amit Shah (Constituency- Gandhinagar, Gujarat)

Minister of State (MoS)- Nityanand Rai (Constituency- Ujiarpur, Bihar); Bandi Sanjay Kumar (Constituency- Karimnagar, Telangana)

Indian short film 'Anuja' nominated for 97th Academy Awards 2025

In January 2025, the Indian short film '**Anuja**', received a nomination in the '**Best Live Action Short Film**' category for the **97th Academy Awards 2025**.

- The film is backed by Indian actress Priyanka Chopra and producer Guneet Monga as executive producer, with Hollywood star-writer Mindy Kaling as producer.
- This marks Guneet Monga's **third** Oscar nomination, after '*The Elephant Whisperers*' and '*Period: End of Sentence*', both of which won Academy Awards.

i. Written and directed by Adam J. Graves, *Anuja* is about a young girl working in a Delhi garment factory who must make a life-changing choice for her family's future.

ii. This nomination puts *Anuja* among five finalists chosen from an initial pool of 180 qualifying films. It will compete against *A Lien*, *I'm Not a Robot*, *The Last Ranger*, and *The Man Who Would Not Remain Silent*.

iii. The film also won the top honor at the **HollyShorts Film Festival** in 2024.

Note: The 97th Academy Awards 2025, hosted by Conan O'Brien, will take place at Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles, United States of America (USA) on March 2, 2025.

The ePlane Company Becomes India's First to Secure DGCA's eVTOL Certification

In January 2025, The ePlane Company, a Chennai-based urban air mobility (UAM) startup at Indian Institute of Technology(IIT) Madras in Chennai(Tamil Nadu,TN) has become the first private Indian firm to receive formal acceptance from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for Type Certification of its electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing (eVTOL) aircraft, 'the e200X'.The company plans to launch its eVTOL services by 2026.

- With this certification, ePlane strengthens its position as a pioneer in Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) in India.

i.The e200X has a compact wingspan that reduces infrastructure requirements, making it suitable for various regions in India and similar global markets.

ii.The ePlane Company was founded by professor Satya Chakravarthy in 2019.

Note: The DGCA has established safety criteria for certifying vertical take-off and landing capable aircraft (VCA) and set guidelines for the design of vertiports used by these aircraft.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

IDBI Bank Re-appoints Rakesh Sharma as MD & CEO for 3 years

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **IDBI Bank** Limited has reappointed **Rakesh Sharma** as Managing Director (**MD**) and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) of the bank for **three years** with effect from March 19 2025.

- The decision, approved by the Board of Directors after receiving approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

i.In 1980, he started his career at the State Bank of India (SBI) as Chief General Manager (CGM). Later, he moved to Lakshmi Vilas Bank Limited, where he served as MD & CEO from March 2014 to September 2015.

ii.He joined Canara Bank as MD & CEO in September 2015 and led the organization for three years before retiring in July 2018.

iii.In October 2018, he became the MD & CEO of IDBI Bank, a role he held until his reappointment.

iv.He currently serves as the President of the Governing Body at the Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII) and is a member of the Managing Committee of the Indian Banks' Association (IBA).

Note: The reappointment comes as IDBI Bank's promoters — Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), holding 49.24%, and the Government of India (GoI), with 45.48% — work to reduce their stakes.

ICC Chairman Jay Shah Elected as New Member of Marylebone Cricket Club

In January 2025, **Jay Shah**, chairman of International Cricket Council (**ICC**) was elected as the board member of the London (the United Kingdom, UK)-based Marylebone Cricket Club (**MCC**) **advisory board**.

- Jay Shah is among the 13 founding members of the newly formed advisory board of World Cricket Connects (WCC), which will be chaired by former Sri Lanka skipper and MCC president **Kumar Sangakkara**.

i.The new advisory board replaced the World Cricket Committee (WCC), which was constituted in 2006.

ii.Other founding members of new advisory board:

1. Anurag Dahiya, Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) of ICC;
2. Chris Dehring Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Cricket West Indies (CWI);
3. Sourav Ganguly, former Captain of Indian Men's Cricket Team and former President of Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI);
4. Graeme Smith, former South Africa Captain;
5. Andrew Strauss, former England Captain and Director of England Cricket Board (ECB);
6. Sanjog Gupta, CEO of JioStar-Sports;
7. Heath Mills, Executive chair at World Cricketers' Association;
8. Trudy Lindblade, CEO of Cricket Scotland;
9. Heather Knight, Women's Captain of England;
10. Mel Jones, Former Australia International and current broadcaster
11. Imtiaz Patel, former chair of SuperSport

Note: MCC announced that the 2nd WCC forum will be held from June 7 to June 8, 2025, ahead of the World Test Championship (WTC) final at Lord's Cricket Ground in London, the UK.

ACQUISITIONS & MERGERS

KMBL Completed Acquisition of StanChart's Personal Loan Portfolio for Rs 3,330 Crore

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited (**KMBL**), a leading Indian private sector bank announced that it has completed the acquisition of **Rs 3,330 crore** personal loan book of Mumbai based Standard Chartered Bank(SCB), India, following the approval from Competition Commission of India (**CCI**).

- In October 2024, KMBL signed an agreement to acquire the personal loan book of Standard Chartered Bank, India for Rs 4,100 crore to strengthen its position in the retail credit market.

i. This acquisition includes all personal loans classified as standard advances.

ii. The personal loans are part of unsecured retail loans, which include retail microcredit had 10.5% share in net advances of KMB at the end of December 2024.

OBITUARY

Renowned Cardiac Surgeon & Padma Shri Awardee Dr. K. M. Cherian passed away

On January 25 2025, a renowned Cardiac Surgeon and Padma Shri Awardee, **Dr Kotturathu Mammen Cherian**, who performed India's 1st coronary artery bypass passed away at the age of 82 in Bengaluru, Karnataka. He was born on 8 March 1942 in the Kingdom of Travancore (now Travancore-Cochin), Kerala.

- He has won numerous awards including the '**Padma Shri**' award.

About Dr Kotturathu Mammen Cherian:

i.Dr. K.M. Cherian, a pioneering cardiac surgeon, began his career with a Master of Surgery (MS) from Kasturba Medical College (KMC), Mangaluru in 1964.

- In 1968, he performed his first open heart surgery at the age of 26 in Australia.

ii.In 1973, he became a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in Cardiothoracic Surgery.

iii.In 1975, he performed India's 1st successful coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) surgery, at Southern Railway Headquarters hospital, Perambur, Chennai(Tamil Nadu, TN).

- He was recognized as an honorary surgeon to the President of India from 1990 to 1993.
- He also introduced the Physician Assistant profession to India in 1992.

iv.He performed India's 2nd Heart Transplant surgery in 1995 and India's 1st Heart-Lung transplantation(HLT) surgery, Pediatric Cardiac Surgery and the Laser heart surgery, transmyocardial revascularization (TMR).

v.In 2004, he founded Frontier Lifeline Hospital and the Dr. Cherian Heart Foundation in Chennai.

v.In 2010, he became the **1st Indian** to be designated as President of the World Society of Cardio Thoracic Surgeons(WSCS).

vi.In May 2016, he was selected to be a member of the "Founder Circle" of the American Association for Thoracic Surgery.

Awards and Honors:

i.In 1991, he was honored with the '**Padma Shri**', India's 4th highest civilian award for his exceptional work in the medical field.

ii.In 2000, he received a 'Lifetime Achievement Award' from Kasturba Medical College (KMC), Manipal for his contributions in the field of cardiothoracic surgery in India.

iii.In 2005, he received a 'Harvard Medical Excellence Award', recognizing his professional development and career advancement.

BOOKS & AUTHORS

A new biography 'Soumitra Chatterjee and His World (Vintage)' Released in WB

"Soumitra Chatterjee and His World" is a comprehensive biography, written by journalist **Sanghamitra Chakraborty**, was released during the Kolkata Literary Meet in West Bengal(WB). It was published by **Penguin India's Vintage Books**.

- The book delivers the multifaceted life of Soumitra Chatterjee, a renowned Indian and Bengali film actor celebrated for his collaboration with filmmaker Satyajit Ray and his contributions to Indian cinema and culture.
- It explores his work as an actor, poet, editor, and artist, offering insights into the cultural landscape of Bengal.

About Soumitra Chatterjee:

- i.** Soumitra Chatterjee was born in 1935 at Kolkata, West Bengal and died in 2020.
 - ii.** Chatterjee starred in 14 Ray films, including the iconic Apur Sansar (The World of Apu), Sonar Kella (The Golden Fortress), Joy Baba Felunath (The Elephant God), Devi (The Goddess), Charulata (The Lonely Wife), Ghare Baire (The Home and the World).
 - iii.** His iconic characters, like Apu and Feluda, are well-known among Bengalis and cinephiles.
 - iii.** Soumitra was the first Indian film personality who was conferred with France's highest award for artists '**Commandeur of, Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1999)**.
- He was also awarded the Padma Bhushan (2004), two National Film Awards (2007 and 2017) and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award (2012), India's highest award in cinema.

IMPORTANT DAYS

International Day of Clean Energy 2025 – January 26

The United Nations (**UN's**) International Day of Clean Energy is observed annually on **26 January** across the globe to raise awareness and encourage action toward a fair and inclusive transition to clean energy, benefiting both people and the planet.

- 26th January 2025 marks the observance of the **2nd** International Day of Clean Energy.

Background:

i. On **January 26, 2023**, the United Nations General Assembly (**UNGA**) declared the International Day of Clean Energy through resolution *A/77/327*, recognizing the need to accelerate the global transition to clean and sustainable energy.

ii. The 1st-ever International Day of Clean Energy was celebrated 26th January 2024.

About International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA):

Director-General(**DG**) – Francesco La Camera

Headquarters -Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates(UAE)

Founded – 2009

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Note: Clean energy is crucial in reducing Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and ensuring that communities have access to reliable power sources.

Background:

i. On **January 26 2023**, the United Nations General Assembly (**UNGA**) declared the International Day of Clean Energy through resolution *A/77/327*, recognizing the need to accelerate the global transition to clean and sustainable energy.

- The 1st-ever International Day of Clean Energy was celebrated on 26th January 2024.

Significance:

i.The day holds significance as it coincides with the founding date of the International Renewable Energy Agency (**IRENA**), a global intergovernmental agency established on January 26, 2009.

- 26 January 2025 marks the **16th anniversary** of the IRENA.
- IRENA supports countries worldwide in their Renewable Energy(RE) transitions, providing crucial data, policy guidance, and fostering international cooperation.

ii.The Day emphasizes the importance of clean energy solutions in combating climate change, reducing energy poverty, and ensuring equitable access to reliable energy for all communities.

Global Challenges:

i.Global Energy Poverty: 685 million people lack access to electricity, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa (more than 80%), limiting education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

ii.Polluting Energy Sources: Continued reliance on fossil fuels perpetuates poverty and environmental harm.

iii.Transition to Clean Energy: Solar, wind, and hydropower are essential in overcoming these challenges and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) – “Affordable and clean energy for all by 2030.”

- SDG 7 aims to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all by 2030.

iv.Decarbonization: Shifting to renewable energy is critical for addressing the climate crisis and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels.

Key Facts:

- i.** A significant portion of greenhouse gases, which trap the Sun's heat and warm the planet, comes from energy production, particularly from burning fossil fuels like **coal, oil, and natural gas** for electricity and heating.
- ii.** Fossil fuels account for nearly **90%** of global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, the leading contributors to climate change.
 - Over 75% of global greenhouse gas (Methane, Nitrous Oxide (N₂O), Nitrogen Trifluoride (NF₃) emissions come from burning fossil fuels for energy.
- iii.** Polluting fuels for cooking cause 3.2 million premature deaths annually; clean cooking can prevent many of these.
- iv.** Every USD 1 invested in renewables creates 3X more jobs than in the fossil fuel industry.
- iv.** Renewable sources such as wind, solar, hydro, and geothermal currently generate around **29%** of the world's electricity.

2025 Events:

- i.** The Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (**DEWA**), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), hosted 2 significant events 'Renewables Talk' and 'Women in Diplomacy' on the occasion of International Day of Clean Energy at the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park in Dubai, the UAE.
- ii.** The event fostered collaboration and facilitated knowledge exchange in the clean and renewable energy sectors and also highlighted the crucial role of women in diplomacy and leadership in driving the clean energy transition.
- iii. Key Attendees:** Dr Amna Al Dahak, UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment, Saeed Mohammed Al Tayer, Managing Director (MD) & Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of DEWA, Francesco La Camera, Director General (DG) of IRENA, HE Dr Nawal Al Hosany, and UAE Permanent Representative to IRENA.

Key Points:

i.UAE aims for **Net Zero by 2050** and drives global clean energy initiatives in the Global South.

- DEWA aims to provide 100% clean energy for Dubai by 2050.

iii.Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park, the largest single-site solar park in the world based on the Independent Power Producer (IPP) model, set to exceed 5,000 megawatt (MW) by 2030, utilizing solar power, green hydrogen, and AI-driven solutions.

Note: As per the International Energy Agency's Electricity report 2024, Global electricity demand is expected to rise at a faster rate over the next 3 years, growing by an average of **3.4%** annually through 2026.

About International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA):

Director-General(**DG**) – Francesco La Camera

Headquarters -Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates(UAE)

Founded – 2009

International Customs Day 2025 – January 26

International Customs Day (**ICD**) is observed annually on **January 26** across the globe to highlight the vital role of customs officials and customs agencies in maintaining security, trade compliance, and major anti-smuggling achievements. This day also commemorates the inaugural session of the Customs Cooperation Council (CCC) (now World Customs Organization, WCO) held in Brussels, Belgium in 1953.

- 26 January 2025 marks the **72nd anniversary** of WCO, an intergovernmental body dedicated to enhancing customs administrations worldwide.
- The theme for ICD 2025 is "Customs Delivering on its Commitment to Efficiency, Security, and Prosperity."

Background:

i.The CCC was established in 1952 as an intergovernmental body to improve the efficiency of customs administrations around the globe.

ii.On December 26, 1983, the Customs Cooperation Council (**CCC**), celebrated the 1st International Customs Day (**ICD**) to commemorate the 30th anniversary of its founding.

iii.In 1994, the CCC became a global organization and was renamed the WCO, expanding its membership to 183 countries, which now manage **98%** of global trade.

About World Customs Organization (WCO):

Secretary-General– Ian Clifton Saunders (the United States of America, USA)

Headquarters– Brussels, Belgium

Established- 1952

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Theme:

i. The theme for ICD 2025 is “**Customs Delivering on its Commitment to Efficiency, Security, and Prosperity.**”

ii. This theme highlights the ongoing dedication of customs authorities in improving the efficiency of global trade, ensuring security, and fostering economic growth.

Background:

i. The CCC was established in 1952 as an intergovernmental body to improve the efficiency of customs administrations around the globe.

ii. On January 26, 1953, the inaugural session of the CCC was held in Brussels, Belgium marking the beginning of the organization worldwide.

iii. On December 26, 1983, the Customs Cooperation Council (**CCC**), celebrated the 1st International Customs Day (**ICD**) to commemorate the 30th anniversary of its founding.

- The event took place in Brussels with **17 member** countries participating.

iv. In 1994, the CCC became a global organization and was renamed the WCO, expanding its membership to 183 countries, which now manage **98%** of global trade.

v. WCO, currently works with **186 member** states to improve customs operations and adapt to the changing landscape of international trade.

Custom Administration in India:

- i.**The Indian Customs system is governed by the **Customs Act of 1962**, which defines the regulations for import and export duties and the customs valuation process.
- ii.**The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (**CBIC**), formerly known as the Central Board of Excise & Customs, is the primary authority overseeing customs, excise, and Goods and Services Tax (GST) matters in India.
- iii.**CBIC operates under the Department of Revenue (DoR), Ministry of Finance (MoF).

Roles of Customs Agencies in India:

- i. Collecting Revenue:** Responsible for collecting import and excise duties, along with other taxes and levies imposed on imported goods.
- ii. Enforcing Compliance:** To ensure compliance with various regulations, including technical quality standards, veterinary regulations, and plant health rules for imports.
- iii. Protecting Consumers:** Work to detect and stop the import of counterfeit goods, ensuring consumer safety.
- iv. Customs Duties and Taxes:** All imported goods in India are subject to customs duty, along with other taxes like Value Added Tax (VAT), excise duty, and service tax.
- v. Customs House Agent (CHA) or Customs Broker,** assists exporters and importers in ensuring accurate documentation and a smooth customs clearance process.

About World Customs Organization (WCO):

Secretary-General– Ian Clifton Saunders (the United States of America, USA)

Headquarters– Brussels, Belgium

Established– 1952

29th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Overview of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo's visit to India from January 23-26, 2025

President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo, visited India from **January 23 to 26, 2025**, at the invitation of Prime Minister **(PM)** of India Narendra Modi. This visit marked his 1st bilateral trip to India commemorating the 75th Anniversary of India-Indonesia Diplomatic Relations.

- On January 26 2025, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo attended the **76th Republic Day celebration of India** as the **Chief Guest** held at Kartavya Path, New Delhi (Delhi).

Highlights of the visit:

- i.** During his visit, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo held bilateral discussions with Narendra Modi, PM of India and Droupadi Murmu, President of India.
- ii.** On January 25 2025, the 3rd India-Indonesia Chief Executive Officers **(CEOs) Forum** held in New Delhi(Delhi) on the sidelines of the Indonesian President's visit to India.
- iii.** The visit of Indonesian President to India witnessed the signing and renewal of **five** Memorandums of Understandings **(MoUs)** covering diverse areas such as health, traditional medicine, and maritime security.

About Indonesia:

President- Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo

Capital- Jakarta

Currency- Indonesian Rupiah **(IDR)**

President of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo, visited India from **January 23 to 26, 2025**, at the invitation of Prime Minister **(PM)** of India Narendra Modi. This visit marked his 1st bilateral trip to India commemorating the 75th Anniversary of India-Indonesia Diplomatic Relations.

- On January 26 2025, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo attended the **76th Republic Day celebration of India** as the **Chief Guest** held at Kartavya Path, New Delhi (Delhi). He was the 4th Indonesian leader to be honoured as India's Republic Day Chief Guest.
- This marks the **1st time**, a 190-member ensemble band from the Indonesian Military Academy (Akmil), and a 152-personnel marching contingent from Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) participated in the Republic Day Parade in India.

Highlights of the visit:

Key Meetings:

i. During his visit, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto held bilateral discussions with Narendra Modi, PM of India and Droupadi Murmu, President of India.

ii. He also held meetings with Vice President (VP) Jagdeep Dhankhar and External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar.

- Both countries reviewed bilateral cooperation in several fields, including politics, defence, security and trade.

3rd India-Indonesia Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) Forum:

i. On January 25 2025, the 3rd India-Indonesia Chief Executive Officers **(CEOs) Forum** held in New Delhi on the sidelines of the Indonesian President's visit to India.

- The forum was co-chaired by Ajay Shriram of India and Anindya Novyan Bakrie of Indonesia.

ii. During the event, the co-chairs presented the **joint report to EAM Subrahmanyam Jaishankar**, India and **Sugiono**, Foreign Minister of Indonesia in the presence of the Indian PM Narendra Modi and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to strengthen economic ties and develop bilateral cooperation in trade and investment.

iii. This joint statement outlining five key sectors of business priority: healthcare, food and agriculture, manufacturing, energy, and technology.

India-Indonesia Signed MoUs and Cooperation Agreements:

The visit of Indonesian President to India witnessed the signing and renewal of **five** Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) covering diverse areas such as health, traditional medicine, and maritime security.

- i.**The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), India and the Ministry of Health, Indonesia have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Health Cooperation.
- ii.**A renewal of the MoU on Maritime Safety and Security Cooperation has been established between the Indian Coast Guard(ICG) and Badan Keamanan Laut Republik (BAKAMLA) (the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency), Indonesia.
- iii.**The Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine & Homeopathy (PCIM&H), Ministry of AYUSH(Ayurveda, Yoga, and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy), India and the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority have signed an MoU in the field of Traditional Medicine Quality Assurance (QA).
- iv.**An MoU on Cooperation in the Fields of Digital Development has been signed between the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology(MeitY), India and the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs, Indonesia.
- v.**A Cultural Exchange Program between the Ministry of Culture, MoC (India) and the Ministry of Culture(Indonesia), was also signed for the time period 2025-2028.

India-Indonesia Strengthen Defence and Maritime Cooperation:

- i.Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA):** India and Indonesia ratified the DCA to enhance defence collaboration, focusing on modernization and sharing expertise.
- ii.Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC):** The JDCC continue to drive bilateral defence cooperation and initiatives, with regular meetings and coordination between Defence Ministers.
- iii.Naval and Military Exercises:** Both countries are engaged in biannual **India-Indonesia Coordinated Patrol**, as well as joint exercises like Ex Garuda Shakti (Army) and Ex Samudra Shakti (Naval).
 - They also participate in multilateral exercises like Milan, Komodo, Tarang Shakti, and Super Garuda Shield.

iv. Cadet and Defence Education Exchanges: Agreements for cadet exchanges between their Naval Academies and Defence Universities, to deepen educational cooperation.

v. Maritime Security Cooperation: The two countries are committed to ensuring secure sea lanes, with mutual interest in Hydrography and Submarine Search and Rescue cooperation.

- They are also engaged in White Shipping Information Exchange (WSIE) agreements and have agreed to station an Indonesian International Liaison Officer (ILO) at the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, Haryana India.

vi. Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Cooperation: Both countries have pledged to combat terrorism and prevent online radicalization. They support mechanisms to counter extremist ideologies and agreed to renew the MoU on Counter-Terrorism Cooperation.

- The '6th Joint Working Group Meeting on Counter-Terrorism' was held in Jakarta, Indonesia on 23 August 2024.

vii. Regional Maritime Safety: Both nations will continue to cooperate on maritime safety and security in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS) to ensure unhindered economic growth in the region.

About Indonesia:

President- Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo

Capital- Jakarta

Currency- Indonesian Rupiah (**IDR**)

MoF Notified Unified Pension Scheme for Central Government Employees, to be Effective from April 01, 2025

In January 2025, the Ministry of Finance (**MoF**) notified the Unified Pension Scheme (**UPS**) as an option for central government employees who are already covered under the National Pension System (**NPS**). The scheme aims to offer retirees assured pension, ensuring financial security and dignity post-retirement.

- As per MoF, the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (**PFRDA**) will monitor UPS regulations and provide operational guidelines.
- The scheme will come into effect from **April 01, 2025**.

i.It is voluntary for existing employees under NPS and those opting for Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) under NPS, to switch to UPS or not. But, once switch is made to UPS then, it cannot be reversed.

ii.The scheme is contributory in nature, wherein the central government employees will be required to contribute **10%** of their basic salary and Dearness Allowance (DA).

- The central government has increased its contribution from 14% (currently under NPS) to **18.5%**.

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- As per MoF, the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (**PFRDA**) will monitor UPS regulations and provide operational guidelines.
- The scheme will come into effect from **April 01, 2025**.

Background:

i.The UPS is an upgrade of the existing **NPS**, which was introduced on 1st January, 2004 by Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and has replaced the Old Pension Scheme (**OPS**).

- NPS was initially introduced for government employees. Later in 2009, it was expanded to cover all sectors.

ii.The UPS was recommended as an alternative scheme to address the concerns of government employees about NPS, by a high-level committee headed by **T.V.**

Somanathan, Cabinet Secretary, in April 2023.

iii.In August 2024, the Union Cabinet led by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has approved the UPS for central government employees. The UPS combines the benefits of existing **NPS** and **OPS**.

About Unified Pension Scheme (UPS):

i.UPS is **voluntary** for existing employees under NPS and those opting for Voluntary Retirement Scheme (**VRS**) under NPS, to switch to UPS or not. But, once switch is made to UPS then, it cannot be reversed.

ii.The scheme is **contributory** in nature, wherein the central government employees will be required to contribute **10%** of their basic salary and Dearness Allowance (DA).

- The central government has increased its contribution from 14% (currently under NPS) to **18.5%**.

iii.The scheme is open for all state governments in India to adopt it in their respective states.

- Maharashtra was the 1st state, which has implemented UPS for its government employees with effective from March 2024.

Eligibility Criteria :

i.Superannuation: Employees who retire after completing at least **10 years** of qualifying services, are eligible for an assured payout.

ii.Retirement under FR 56 (j): Employees who are retired by the Government of India (GoI) under the provision of **Fundamental Rules (FR) 56 (j)**, which allows retirement in the public interest for efficiency, before the regular superannuation.

- The retirement under FR 56 (j) is not a penalty under the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control, and Appeal) Rules, 1965.

iii.Voluntary Retirement with minimum 25 years of service: Employees who take Voluntary Retirement (VR) after completing minimum 25 years of service are eligible for the scheme.

- However, in this case, the payout will start from the date the employee would have attained the age of superannuation, had they continued working.

Note: MoF has clarified that the assured pension will not be offered to employees who are dismissed, removed, or resign from service, in such cases; the UPS option will not be available.

Key Rules for Assured Pension under UPS:

i.Full Assured Pension: Under the UPS, all central government employees who have served for minimum **25 years**, will receive **50%** of their last drawn salary from the past 12 months before superannuation as pension.

ii.Proportionate Pension for shorter services: The pension will be proportionate for those with shorter service periods (less than 25 years) of qualifying service, based on their service time.

iii.Assured Pension for VR: For employees retiring voluntarily after completing 25 years of service, the assured payout/pension will start from the date they would have attained the age of superannuation (had they continued in service until official retirement).

iv. Assured family pension: The scheme has a provision of family pension, in case of an employee's death. The family of the deceased employee will be eligible to receive **60%** of the pension amount that employee was receiving immediately before his death.

- The pension will be provided to the legally wedded spouse of the deceased, according to the date of superannuation, VR or retirement under FR 56 (j).

v. Assured minimum pension: The scheme has a unique feature of assured minimum pension for those employees who have served for **at least 10 years**, will be entitled to receive a minimum pension benefit of **Rs 10,000 per month** on superannuation.

vi. Inflation Indexation: The assured pension, family pension, and minimum pension will be indexed to inflation. Also, UPS subscribers will be entitled to receive Dearness Relief (DR), based on the All India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (**AICPI-IW**) as in the case of serving employees.

vii. Lumpsum payment at superannuation: Apart from gratuity, UPS subscribers will receive a lumpsum payment equivalent to 1/10th (**10%**) of their monthly emoluments (pay + DA) as of the retirement date for every completed **6 months** of service.

- This payment will not affect or change the assured pension amount.

Recent Related News:

In December 2024, the Department of Revenue (DoR), Ministry of Finance (MoF) has notified that the Government of India (GoI) has withdrawn the Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED), commonly known as the Windfall tax, thereby eliminating levies on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF), crude oil, petrol, and diesel. This move, effective immediately, aims to enhance profitability in the oil sector, foster growth in the energy industry, and boost exports.

- Alongside, the Road and Infrastructure Cess (RIC) on petrol and diesel exports has also been removed.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

55th Annual Meeting of WEF held in Switzerland from January 20-24, 2025 : Part I

The **55th** Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (**WEF 2025**) was held from January 20-24, 2025 in Davos-Klosters, **Switzerland**.

- The annual meeting is based on the theme “**Collaboration for the Intelligent Age**” with the event organized around five sub-themes: Reimagining growth, Industries in the intelligent age, Investing in people, Safeguarding the planet and Rebuilding trust.
- The Indian delegation to the WEF 2025 was headed by Union Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw**, Ministry of Railways(MoR), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting(MIB) and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology(MeitY) with a vision of the country’s growth as One Nation, One Voice. He led the largest ever Indian delegation to the forum, with 5 Union ministers, 3 Chief Ministers(CMs) and several other state leaders.

i.13 new industrial clusters from **Australia, Brazil, Colombia, India(5), the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Thailand**, and the United Kingdom (**UK**) have joined the WEF’s Transitioning Industrial Clusters initiative, bringing the total to **33** across **16** countries and **5** continents.

ii.The **25th** edition of [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) was launched during the WEF 2025 in Switzerland. According to the report, **India** slipped to **3rd** spot in terms of the trust of the general population in the government, businesses, media and NGOs. **China** topped the list followed by Indonesia at the 2nd spot.

iii.The **31st** Annual Crystal Award was announced at the WEF 2025 in Davos-Klosters.

- The recipients of the award included renowned architect and 2024 Pritzker Prize laureate **Riken Yamamoto**, celebrated fashion designer, philanthropist and champion of women’s rights **Diane von Furstenberg**, and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and global advocate for children’s rights **David Beckham**.

iv.During the WEF 2025, **7** countries from Africa – **Angola, Bangladesh, Gabon, Guatemala, Kenya, Senegal**, and **Tanzania**– joined the Global Plastic Action Partnership (**GPAP**), bringing a total to **25** countries with a combined population of over 1.5 billion people.

v.Indian-origin South African filmmaker **Anant Singh** has been appointed to the Global Arts and Culture Council (**GACC**) at the GACC’s inaugural meeting held at WEF 2025.

About World Economic Forum(WEF):

President and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Børge Brende(Norway)

Headquarters– Cologny, Switzerland

Founded– 1971

The **55th** Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (**WEF 2025**) was held from January 20-24, 2025 in Davos-Klosters, **Switzerland**.

- The annual meeting is based on the theme "**Collaboration for the Intelligent Age**" with the event organized around five sub-themes: Reimagining growth, Industries in the intelligent age, Investing in people, Safeguarding the planet and Rebuilding trust
- The event witnessed the participation of around 3,000 global leaders featuring over 350 government leaders (including 60 heads of state), business and civil society leaders, prominent scientific and cultural thinkers from more than 130 countries.

Highlights of 55th Annual Meeting of WEF:

India's participation at WEF 2025:

i.The Indian delegation to the WEF 2025 was headed by Union Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw**, Ministry of Railways(MoR), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting(MIB) and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology(MeitY) with a vision of the country's growth as One Nation, One Voice.

- He led the largest ever Indian delegation to the forum, with 5 Union ministers, 3 Chief Ministers(CMs) and several other state leaders.

ii.The delegation also included Union Minister Chandrakant Raghunath Patil, Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS), Union Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Union Minister Chirag Paswan, Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI), Union Minister of State(MoS) (Independent Charge I/C) Jayant Chaudhary, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu, Telangana CM Revanth Reddy and Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis.

- **Jayant Chaudhary** represented India at the forum to share the country's vision of developing a skilled workforce, promoting innovation, and advancing sustainable development.

iii.8 Indian **states** represented at WEF 2025 – Kerala, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Andhra Pradesh (AP), Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu(TN), Karnataka, and West Bengal(WB).

- The meeting was attended by more than **65** Indian business representatives.

iv.India participated in the 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Investment' session, which was jointly organized by **Invest India**, Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade(DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry(MoC&I) and World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies(**WAIPA**) and supported by World Investment for Development Alliance (**WIDA**).

- WIDA is a global platform of 13 organizations that focuses on promoting sustainable and inclusive investment through collaborative efforts.

13 industrial clusters join WEF:

i.13 new industrial clusters from **Australia, Brazil, Colombia, India(5), the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Thailand**, and the United Kingdom (**UK**) have joined the WEF's Transitioning Industrial Clusters initiative, bringing the total to **33** across **16** countries and **5** continents.

- This initiative was launched at COP26 in 2021 with an aim to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions (GHGs) while promoting economic growth and job creation.

ii.These clusters can reduce **832 million tonnes** of carbon dioxide(CO₂)-equivalent emissions annually while contributing **USD 492 billion** to global Gross domestic product (GDP) and support 4.3 million jobs.

5 new Indian industrial clusters join WEF:

i. Gopalpur Industrial Park (Odisha)– Focused on attracting investments in green energy.

ii. Kakinada Cluster (AP)– A port-based hub for decarbonization solutions like green ammonia and hydrogen.

iii. Kerala Green Hydrogen Valley (Kerala):– supports hydrogen-powered transport strategy.

iv. Mundra Cluster (Gujarat)– Integrates green power with infrastructure for large-scale industrial projects.

v. Mumbai Green Hydrogen Cluster (Maharashtra)– Promotes the green hydrogen economy.

Note:The **other** clusters include – Cartagena Industrial Cluster (Colombia), Hunter Region (Australia), Jubail Industrial City (Saudi Arabia), Port of Açu Low Carbon Hub (Brazil), Port of Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Saraburi Sandbox (Thailand), The Solent Cluster (the UK) and Tranzero Initiative (Sweden).

Crystal Award Winners 2025:

i.The **31st** Annual Crystal Award was announced at the WEF 2025 in Davos-Klosters.

- The Crystal Awards 2025 was presented by **Hilde Schwab**, Chairwoman and Co-Founder of the WEF's World Arts Forum.

ii. The recipients of the award included renowned architect and 2024 Pritzker Prize laureate **Riken Yamamoto**, celebrated fashion designer, philanthropist and champion of women's rights **Diane von Furstenberg**, and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and global advocate for children's rights **David Beckham**.

About Crystal Award:

The Crystal Award is given to those cultural leaders who have made notable contributions in promoting social, environmental and creative progress worldwide.

India Slips to 3rd Place in Edelman Trust Barometer 2025 Rankings; China topped

The **25th** edition of [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) was launched during the WEF 2025 in Switzerland. According to the report, **India** slipped to **3rd** spot in terms of the trust of the general population in the government, businesses, media and NGOs. **China** topped the list followed by Indonesia at the 2nd spot.

- The report was made after a survey of more than **33,000** respondents across **28** countries with Japan replacing the UK at the bottom.

Key Points:

i.India ranked low at **13th** place when it comes to trust of people in other countries, in companies with Indian headquarters.

- Within the high-income group, **India** was ranked **fourth** after Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and China.

ii.Canada topped this list of **foreign-headquartered companies**, followed by **Japan**, **Germany**, the UK, France and the United States of America (USA), while those ranked higher than India also included Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, China and Brazil.

iii.Despite the overall decline in trust, **India** (75) remains one of the most trusted countries among developing nations including China (77%), Indonesia (76), and the UAE (72).

- Five of the largest 10 global economies were among the least trusting nations – **Japan** (the least trusting at 37%), Germany (41), the UK (43), the US (47) and France (48).

WMO Unveiled Framework for Business Engagement in EWS:

During the WEF 2025, Celeste Saulo, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation (**WMO**) presented a white paper titled 'Catalysing Business Engagement in Early Warning Systems (EWS)' co-authored with the WEF and The Australian National University(ANU), Australia.

- It presented a strategy to use private sector capabilities in innovation, data utilization, and operational efficiency to adapt and mitigate the impacts of extreme weather.
- The WMO will work with governments and businesses to execute the strategies mentioned in the white paper, to close the global early warning gap by 2030, in alignment with the **Early Warnings For All Initiative**.

Key Highlights:

The report introduced a framework to increase business participation through:

i. Innovation in Technology– Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and big data can help businesses to make weather-driven operational decisions.

ii. Operational Optimization– Companies can use EWS data to make preventive supply chain adjustments, reduce operational risks, and create climate-resilient products.

iii. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)- EWS can help in achieving CSR goals by helping businesses protect communities and build trust.

With 7 new members GPAP expands to 25 countries:

During the WEF 2025, **7** countries from Africa – **Angola, Bangladesh, Gabon, Guatemala, Kenya, Senegal, and Tanzania**– joined the Global Plastic Action Partnership (**GPAP**), bringing a total to **25** countries with a combined population of over 1.5 billion people.

- GPAP was launched during the WEF's Sustainable Development Summit in 2018.
- **Maharashtra** state, through its Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, has joined the GPAP in 2022.
- It will find solutions to tackle challenges such as promoting sustainable materials, strengthening recycling systems, reducing GHGs etc.

Note: The plastics sector is responsible for an estimated 1.8 billion tonnes of GHGs emissions annually, and much of this comes from the disposal and degradation of plastics.

Growing geoeconomic fragmentation can decrease global GDP by USD 5.7 trillion: WEF

i. The [Navigating Global Financial System Fragmentation report : January 2025](#) developed in collaboration with **Oliver Wyman** was released at the event which estimated that fragmentation resulting from statecraft policies could cost the global economy USD 0.6 trillion to **USD 5.7 trillion** – up to **5%** of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – due to reduced trade and cross-border capital flows as well as lost economic efficiencies.

- It could also increase global inflation by more than **5%** in a very high fragmentation scenario.
- The report shows that the economic impact of rising geoeconomic fragmentation could cross the disruptions caused by the 2008 financial crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic.

ii. In the most extreme fragmentation scenario, Eastern and Western blocs could observe GDP growth decline by over **10%** – with **India, Brazil, Türkiye**, and emerging economies in **Latin America, Africa** and **South-East Asia** bearing the greatest burden.

Anant Singh appointed to GACC:

i. Indian-origin South African filmmaker **Anant Singh** has been appointed to the Global Arts and Culture Council (**GACC**) at the GACC's inaugural meeting held at WEF 2025.

- He is known for highlighting apartheid, Human Immunodeficiency Virus(HIV)/Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome(AIDS), and gender-based violence through his films and one such film is 'Long Walk to Freedom, a biopic of Nelson Mandela.
- He was honored with WEF's Crystal Award in **2001**.

ii. Other notable members of the council include- Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy (Academy award-winning film director); George Osbourne (Chair of the British Museum); Renee Fleming (World-renowned Soprano) and Hany Ulrich Obrist (Artistic Director of the Serpentine Gallery).

- Andrea Bocelli (World-renowned Tenor); Deborah Rutter (President of the John F Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts in the US); Nile Rodgers (Musician, Producer and Founder of the We Are Family Foundation); Jin Xing (Dancer – Actress and Transgender Activist); Yana Peel (Global Head of Arts & Culture – Chanel) and Misty Copeland (Dancer, Author, Producer) are other notable members of the council.

About World Economic Forum(WEF):

President and Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Børge Brende(Norway)

Headquarters– Cologny, Switzerland

Founded– 1971

WHO Declares Georgia as the 45th Malaria-Free Country

In January 2025, the World Health Organization (**WHO**) declared that **Georgia** officially certified as **malaria-free**, celebrating a major achievement in the country's nearly century-long fight against the disease.

- It has become the **45th** country and the **first** in the WHO European Region to attain malaria-free status.

Note: Globally, WHO has certified a total of 45 countries and 1 territory as malaria-free.

Background:

i. Despite being malaria-free for 25 years, Georgia experienced a re-emergence of the disease in 2002.

ii. In 2005, Georgia, along with nine other countries in the WHO European Region, signed the **Tashkent Declaration**, renewing its commitment to eliminating malaria.

iii. In 2015, Georgia reported zero indigenous cases of malaria, successfully interrupting the transmission of the three main malaria parasite species: *Plasmodium falciparum*, *Plasmodium malariae* and *Plasmodium vivax*.

About WHO malaria-free certification:

WHO grants certification of malaria elimination to a country when it can demonstrate, beyond a reasonable doubt, that indigenous transmission has been interrupted nationwide for at least **three consecutive years**.

- The final decision on certification is made by the WHO Director-General (DG), based on recommendations from the independent Technical Advisory Group on Malaria Elimination and Certification (TAG-MEC) and validation from the Malaria Policy Advisory Group (MPAG).

About Georgia

President – Mikheil Kavelashvili

Capital – Tbilisi

Currency – Georgian Lari (GEL)

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI Announced Series of Steps to Inject Rs 1.50 lakh Crore into the Banking System

On January 27 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) announced a series of steps to inject about **Rs 1.5 lakh crore** into the banking system in a phased manner. The main objective of these steps is to address the liquidity shortfall caused by the RBI's intervention in selling dollars to stabilize the Indian Rupee (INR).

Other Key Measures:

i. RBI will purchase Government Securities (**G-secs**) through Open Market Operations (OMO) worth **Rs 60,000 crore** in three tranches of Rs 20,000 each.

- The OMO auctions will be held on January 30, February 13, and February 20, 2025.

ii. RBI has further announced a 56-day Variable Rate Repo (**VRR**) auction for a notified amount of **Rs 50,000 crore** which is scheduled to be held on February 7, 2025.

- The VRR aims to ensure liquidity requirements of banks till March 31, 2025.

iii. As part of various steps to manage liquidity conditions, RBI announced a USD/INR Buy/Sell Swap auction of **USD 5 billion** for a tenor of 6 months to be held on January 31, 2025.

- Under this swap arrangement, RBI will borrow dollars in exchange for rupees, with the interest cost determined by the price at which it agrees to repurchase the dollars at the end of the tenure.

Important Terms:

i.VRR: It acts as a means to infuse short-term liquidity into the banking system. It is a process through which RBI allows banks to borrow at a rate determined by the market generally lower than Repo rate for a maximum period of 14 days.

ii.OMO: It is a quantitative tool of RBI's Monetary Policy, which is used to maintain liquidity in the banking system. It involves buying or selling of G-secs from or to the public and banks.

Points to Note:

- The RBI last conducted a USD/INR Buy/Sell Swap auction on March 26, **2019**. Then the swap was for USD 5 billion for 3 years.
- As of January 24, 2025, the banking system faced a significant liquidity deficit of Rs.2.82 lakh crore.
- The 1st such VRR was conducted on January 16, 2025 worth Rs 50,000 crore and standalone primary dealers were allowed to participate in the auction with other eligible bidders.

iSPIRT Launches PSLAI to Strengthen MSME Financing

In January 2025, the Indian Software Product Industry Round Table (**iSPIRT**), a think tank for India's software industry, launched the **Priority Sector Lenders Association of India (PSLAI)** which was formed under Section 8 of the Companies Act 1972.

- PSLAI will be headed by **Priyashmita Guha** as the Chief Executive Officer(CEO) and run with the help of an accomplished Board of Directors(BoD).
- PSLAI aims to streamline and enhance the availability of loans under Priority Sector Lending (PSL) norms, a critical financial sector for banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) in India.

i.The founding members include lending institutions like **UGRO Capital Limited**, India Infoline Finance Limited (**IIFL**), and fintech companies like GetVantage Private Limited and GetGrowth Capital Private Limited.

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About PSLAI:

i.PSLAI is a non-profit organization focused on promoting loans for sectors outlined by the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) PSL guidelines.

ii.The founding members include lending institutions like **UGRO Capital Limited**, India Infoline Finance Limited (**IIFL**), and fintech companies like GetVantage Private Limited and GetGrowth Capital Private Limited.

iii.PSLAI's goal is to help sectors such as agriculture, small businesses (MSMEs), and affordable housing receive the necessary financial support they need to grow.

Key Points:

- i.**As per RBI guidelines, banks must allocate at least **40%** of their Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) to PSL loans, which leads to an annual disbursement of **Rs 64 trillion** towards sectors like agriculture, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and affordable housing.
- ii.**Currently, the MSME sector which contributes 29% of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 45.73% of exports faces a credit gap of about **Rs 103 trillion** in the Financial Year 2024 (FY24).
- iii.**Despite a demand for credit of **Rs.138 trillion**, only 25% of the formal financing needs of MSMEs are met, with the majority relying on informal credit sources.
 - To address this issue, the PSLAI was established to improve credit access for MSMEs by leveraging technology.

Objectives of PSLAI:

- i.Credit Disbursements:** PSLAI aims to double the Rs 64 trillion currently disbursed annually under PSL and reach Rs 130 trillion in the next 3-5 years.
- ii.MSME Growth:** MSMEs will benefit from innovative lending solutions using Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), such as Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN), which assesses borrowers' creditworthiness based on cash flow data.
- iii.New Lender Categories:** PSLAI plans to establish a new category of NBFC-PSL focusing on PSL loans, similar to existing categories like NBFC-Micro Finance Institutions (NBFC-MFIs) & NBFC-Housing Finance Companies (NBFC-HFCs).

About Priority Sector Lenders Association of India (PSLAI):

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Priyashmita Guha

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established- 2025

HSBC India Launches 'HSBC TravelOne Credit Card' for Frequent Travelers

In January 2025, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, India (**HSBC India**) introduced '**HSBC TravelOne Credit Card**', to provide convenient and valuable benefits to those who travel frequently.

- This card offers a variety of benefits, such as the ability to instantly redeem rewards across airline and hotel partners.
- The joining fee of the card is **Rs.4,999**. Afterwards, the annual fee is Rs.4,999, or free if you spend more than Rs.800,000 a year.

i.New users who spend Rs 10,000 within the first 30 days will receive Rs 1,000 cashback, Rs 3,000 in PostCard vouchers, and a three-month EazyDiner Prime Membership.

- Users who spend over Rs 12 lakh annually will receive an additional 10,000 bonus reward points.

ii.The card also provides purchase protection of up to USD 20,000 annually.

iii.The card offers 6 local and 4 international airport lounge visits each year, along with discounts on holiday bookings, car rentals, and lifestyle experiences.

YES Bank Launches Frictionless Finance Accelerator Programme in Partnership with RBIH and SPJIMR

In January 2025, **YES Bank Limited**, based in Mumbai, Maharashtra, in partnership with the Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (**RBIH**) in Bengaluru, Karnataka, and the S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research (**SPJIMR**) in Mumbai, launched the **Frictionless Finance Accelerator Programme** on the occasion of National Startup Day (January 16 2025).

- This initiative aims to assist fintech startups in overcoming challenges, scaling their innovations, and promoting financial inclusion in India.

i. The programme will **focus on innovations** in digital lending, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered risk management, blockchain-based payments, and financial inclusion (FI).

ii. Startups will receive **support from** RBIH, SPJIMR, and YES Bank, with platforms like YES Connect helping them navigate regulations, improve business models, and foster growth through partnerships with fintechs, industry leaders, and regulators.

iii. The programme is in line with the growing investment in global venture capital, which reached USD 314 billion in 2024, and the projected USD 20 trillion global digital economy by 2030.

RBI Penalizes J&K Bank, BoI, Canara Bank for Regulatory Non-Compliance

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) imposed penalties on 3 major banks for failing to comply with regulatory guidelines.

- The banks include the Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir based Jammu and Kashmir Bank Limited (J&K Bank), Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Bank of India Limited (BoI) and Bengaluru (Karnataka) based Canara Bank Limited.

i. J&K Bank was fined **Rs 3.31 crore** for violations related to financial inclusion, particularly in areas like Basic Savings Bank Deposit Account (BSBDA) norms, Know Your Customer (KYC) compliance, and loan and advance restrictions.

ii. BoI faced a penalty of **Rs 1 crore** for non-compliance with specific provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

iii. Canara Bank received a penalty of **Rs 1.63 crore** for deficiencies in priority sector lending, deposit interest rate regulations, and financial inclusion measures, specifically around BSBDA.

BIMTECH launches Blockchain-Based Digital Currency "BIMCOIN"

In January 2025, Birla Institute of Management Technology (**BIMTECH**) in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP), a top Indian business school, launched 'BIMCOIN', a blockchain-based digital currency for its ecosystem.

- Following the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras, Chennai, (Tamil Nadu,TN), BIMTECH has become the **1st business management institute** in India to launch a blockchain-based digital currency.
- This initiative aligns with the **Viksit Bharat 2047** aims to streamline payments and transactions among students, vendors, and administrators through a secure, transparent, and decentralized platform.

i.BIMCOIN operates on a blockchain, offers features like decentralization, transparency, and smart contracts.

ii.It enhances security, protects against fraud, and promotes ethical practices while serving as a comprehensive educational tool for students to gain hands-on experience in blockchain technology and digital currencies.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Three Indian Women Make It to Forbes 50 Over 50 Global List 2025, with Quarraisha Abdool Karim Ranking First

In January 2025 **Forbes**, an American global media company has unveiled its **first** [Forbes "50 Over 50" Women Global list 2025](#) celebrating the achievements of inspiring women from 32 countries and territories across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and South and Central America.

- **Quarraisha Abdool Karim**, expert in infectious diseases epidemiology and one of the top researchers on Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), is **ranked first**, while **Rafaela Aponte-Diamant** is the co-owner of the Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) based in Geneva, Switzerland, **ranked 2nd**.
- The list features three remarkable Indian women: **Urmila Asher**, popularly known as 'Gujju Ben' and the founder of Gujju Ben Na Nasta, ranked 3rd; **Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw**, a billionaire and founder of Biocon India Private Limited imited, ranked 32nd; and **Sheela Patel**, a renowned activist, ranked 37th.

About Forbes:

Chief Operating Officer (**CEO**)– Sherry Phillips

Headquarters– New Jersey, the United States of America (USA)

Established– 1917

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List of Top 5 Women:

Rank	Name	Designation	Country
1	Quarraisha Abdool Karim	Cofounder and Associate Scientific Director, CAPRISA	South Africa, SA
2	Rafaela Aponte-Diamant	Co-owner, MSC	Switzerland
3	Urmila Asher	Founder, Gujju Ben Na Nasta	India
4	Margaret Atwood	Author	Canada
5	Farana Boodhram	Founder, MiDesk Global	South Africa

Table of India Women in the list:

Rank	Name	Designation
3	Urmila Asher	Founder, Gujju Ben Na Nasta
32	Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw	Founder, Biocon India Private limited
37	Sheela Patel	Activist and Co-founder, SPARC

About Indian Women on the list:

Urmila Asher (Gujju Ben– 80 years old) launched her food business, **Gujju Ben na Nasta**, showcasing her expertise in Gujarati cuisine during COVID-19

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw (71 years old) is a billionaire **entrepreneur** from Bengaluru, Karnataka, and a prominent leader in the biopharmaceutical sector.

- She **established** Biocon India Private Limited in 1978. Over time, she transformed Biocon into a global name in affordable healthcare solutions. She has a net worth of **USD 3.6 billion**, as noted by Forbes

Sheela Patel (72 years old) is an **activist** and academic dedicated to improving conditions for slum dwellers and promoting equal urban spaces.

- In 1984, she **co-founded** the Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres (**SPARC**) in Mumbai (Maharashtra) to provide housing for low-income communities.
- She also **co-founded** Slum Dwellers International, which operates in 33 countries, and **led** climate resilience initiatives for informal settlements, including the Roof Over Our Heads campaign at 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

About Forbes 50 Over 50 Global List:

- i.**List was produced in **partnership** with Morning Joe, an American talk show cohost **Mika Brzezinski** and her Know Your Value initiative.
- ii.**The list highlights women who are redefining success and proving that age is no barrier to making an impact.
- iii.**The list **features** entrepreneurs, investors, inventors, artists, activists, and other high achievers

About Forbes:

Chief Operating Officer (CEO)– Sherry Phillips

Headquarters– New Jersey, the United States of America (USA)

Established– 1917

SPORTS

Australian Open 2025: Jannik Sinner & Madison Keys Win Men's and Women's Singles Title

i.Jannik Sinner of Italy won the Men's Singles title while **Madison Keys** of United States of America (USA) won the Women's Singles title at the **Australian Open (AO) 2025** held at Melbourne Park, Melbourne, **Australia**.

- This was the **113th** edition of the Australian Open, the **57th** in the Open Era, and the first major of 2025 and was held from **12th January to 26th January** 2025.

Prize Money:

The total prize money for the tournament was **USD 96.5 million**.

Key Highlights:

i.India's Prithvi Sekhar won the **men's singles** title by defeating France's Olivier Grave at the **Australian Open Deaf Championships** 2025 in Melbourne.

- This is his **2nd** consecutive title after winning it in **2024**.

ii.World No. 1 Jannik Sinner (Italy) won his **2nd** consecutive Australian Open title after defeating World No. 2 Alexander Zverev (Germany).

- He won 1st major singles title in **Australian Open** in **2024**.

iii.Madison Keys (USA) secured her **first**-ever Grand Slam title after defeating defending champion Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus) in the finals.

iv.Harri Heliövaara (Finland) and **Henry Patten (Britain)** have won their **2nd** major title at the Australian Open after defeating Italian pair Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori in the finals.

v.Katerina Siniakova (Czech Republic) and **Taylor Townsend (USA)** won their **2nd** Grand Slam title as a **team** after defeating Jelena Ostapenko (Latvia) and Hsieh Su-wei (Taiwan) to the women's doubles titles on the finals.

vi.Australian pair Olivia Gadecki and **John Peers** defeated their compatriots John-Patrick Smith and Kimberly Birrell to win the mixed doubles final.

- This was 1st mixed doubles title for Gadecki's while it was 2nd Peers.

About Australian Open:

i.The Australian Open is a tennis tournament organized by **Tennis Australia** annually at Melbourne Park in Melbourne, Australia.

- It is chronologically the **first** of the **4** Grand Slam tennis events every year, held before the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open.

ii.It was first held in **1905** and is played on **hard courts**.

Jannik Sinner of Italy won the Men's Singles title while **Madison Keys** of United States of America (USA) won the Women's Singles title at the **Australian Open (AO) 2025** held at Melbourne Park, Melbourne, **Australia**.

- This was the **113th** edition of the Australian Open, the **57th** in the Open Era, and the first major of 2025 and was held from **12th January to 26th January** 2025.

Note:

i.**Five** Indian contingents participated in the tournament – Rohan Bopanna, Yuki Bhambri, and Sriram Balaji, Sumit Nagal and Rithvik Bollipalli.

ii.**Rithvik Bollipalli** had made his Grand Slam **debut** in Melbourne.

Prize Money:

The total prize money for the tournament was **USD 96.5 million**.

- The men's and women's singles champions were given **USD 3.5 million** while the doubles' (men and women) champions were given **USD 810,000**.

Australian Open 2025 Winners:

Category	Winner	Runner-Up
Men's Singles	Jannik Sinner (Italy)	Alexander Zverev (Germany)
Women's Singles	Madison Keys (USA)	Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus)
Men's Doubles	Harri Heliövaara (Finland) and Henry Patten (Britain)	Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori (Italy)
Women's Doubles	Katerina Siniakova (Czech Republic) and Taylor Townsend (USA)	Hsieh Su-Wei (Taiwan) and Jelena Ostapenko (Latvia)
Mixed Doubles	Olivia Gadecki and John Peers (Australia)	Kimberly Birrell and John-Patrick Smith (Australia)

Prithvi Sekhar wins Australian Deaf tennis championship

i. India's **Prithvi Sekhar** won the **men's singles** title by defeating France's Olivier Grave at the **Australian Open Deaf Championships 2025** in Melbourne.

- This is his **2nd** consecutive title after winning it in **2024**.

ii. He has also won men's singles world title at the **2019 World Deaf Tennis Championships**.

iii. Prithvi also represented India at the Deaflympics in **2013** and **2017** and has won a bronze medal in the mixed doubles at the 2017 Summer Deaflympics.

Highlights of the Australian Open:

Men's Singles:

i. World No. 1 **Jannik Sinner (Italy)** won his **2nd** consecutive Australian Open title after defeating World No. 2 Alexander Zverev (Germany).

- He won 1st major singles title in **Australian Open** in **2024**.
- Italy's Sinner is the **11th** man in the **Open Era** to retain the title in Melbourne.

ii. He has become Italy's first **three**-time men's Grand Slam singles champion surpassing Nicola Pietrangeli who won 2 consecutive men's titles at Roland Garros in 1959-60.

iii. He is also the **youngest** man to win multiple Australian Open titles since Jim Courier in 1992-93.

Women's Singles:

i. **Madison Keys (USA)** secured her **first**-ever Grand Slam title after defeating defending champion Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus) in the finals.

- This was her first Grand Slam **final** since the **2017 US Open**.
- At 29, she has become the **fourth-oldest** player to win her first Grand Slam title.

ii. With this victory, Madison Keys' rank will rise to number **7** in the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) rankings.

iii. She is one of **five** Americans to win the Australian Open this century, joining Lindsay Davenport Jennifer Capriati, Serena Williams and Sofia Kenin (2020).

iv. She has also become the **first** women's singles player to defeat the top two players at a major since Svetlana Kuznetsova at Roland Garros 2009 and the first at the AO since Serena Williams in 2005.

Men's Doubles:

Harri Heliövaara (Finland) and **Henry Patten (Britain)** have won their **2nd** major title at the Australian Open after defeating Italian pair Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori in the finals.

- Heliövaara and Patten won the **Wimbledon title 2024** which was their **first** major event as a team.
- They have also won four tour-level trophies in 2024.

Women's Doubles:

i. Katerina Siniakova (Czech Republic) and **Taylor Townsend (USA)** defeated Jelena Ostapenko (Latvia) and Hsieh Su-wei (Taiwan) to win the women's doubles titles in the finals.

- This was their **2nd** Grand Slam title as a **team** after their Wimbledon title win in 2024.

ii. It was the **10th** major title for **Katerina Siniakova**.

- For **Townsend**, it was her **2nd** title after she won the title as a junior in Melbourne in 2012.

Mixed Doubles:

i. Australian pair **Olivia Gadecki** and **John Peers** defeated their compatriots John-Patrick Smith and Kimberly Birrell to win the mixed doubles final.

- This was the **first all-Australian** final in the hard-court major in the Open Era and the first since **1967**.

ii. This was Gadecki's **first** mixed doubles title at a **Grand Slam** while Peers won his **second** after winning the 2022 U.S. Open in the category.

- John Peers also won men's doubles gold at the Paris Olympics and the 2017 Australian Open.

iii. This has been **14th** edition of the Australian Open where a home player was crowned champion in at least one category.

About Australian Open:

i. The Australian Open is a tennis tournament organized by **Tennis Australia** annually at Melbourne Park in Melbourne, Australia.

- It is chronologically the **first** of the **4** Grand Slam tennis events every year, held before the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open.

ii. It was first held in **1905** and is played on **hard courts**.

Indian GM Iniyam Panneerselvam wins 9th Johor International Chess title

In January 2025, 22-year-old Grandmaster (GM) **Iniyam Panneerselvam** from Erode, Tamil Nadu (TN), won the **9th Johor International Open Chess Tournament**, organized by the Johor Chess Association which is located in Fairview International School in Johor Bahru, **Malaysia**.

- He defeated Vietnamese **GM Nguyen Van Huy** in the final round.
- Indian International Master (IM) V.S. Raahul and Chinese IM Li Bo secured second and third places, respectively.

i. Iniyam scored an impressive 8.5 points over nine rounds in the tournament.

ii. He finished 1.5 points ahead of his nearest rival, achieving victories against four IMs and one GM.

Note: Earlier in January 2025, Iniyam won the 15th Chennai Open International GM Chess Tournament 2024

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Leprosy Day – January 26 2025

World Leprosy Day (**WLD**) is observed annually on the **last Sunday of January** across the globe to raise awareness about leprosy and to celebrate the resilience of those affected by the disease, combat stigma and discrimination. The day also serves as a reminder to eradicate leprosy and improve the lives of those impacted by it.

- 26 January 2025 marks the **72nd** observance of the WLD.
- The theme for WLD 2025 is "**Unite. Act. Eliminate.**" which highlights the need to urge governments, non-governmental organizations (NGO's), and individuals to work together and eliminate the disease & its associated stigma.
- In 2024, WLD was observed on 28 January and in 2026, WLD will be observed on 25th January.

Note:In India, WLD is observed on **January 30** every year, coinciding with the death anniversary (January 30 1948) of Mahatma Gandhi in recognition of his legacy, social justice and the welfare of people affected by leprosy.

Background:

i.WLD was founded in 1954 by **Raoul Follereau**, a French philanthropist and writer to raise global awareness about leprosy.

- The **first-ever** WLD was observed on 31st (Last Sunday of January)1954.

About World Health Organization (WHO):

Director-General (**DG**)- Dr.Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland

Established- April 7, 1948

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Background:

i.WLD was founded in 1954 by **Raoul Follereau**, a French philanthropist and writer to raise global awareness about leprosy.

- The **first-ever** WLD was observed on 31st January (Last Sunday of January)**1954**.

ii.The day was chosen to coincide with the Feast of Saint Lazarus, the biblical figure who is associated with leprosy in the Christian tradition.

iii.Since then, WLD was observed annually and was recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Significance:

i. 2025 also commemorates the 152nd anniversary of the discovery of **Mycobacterium leprae** (*M. leprae*), the bacterium that causes leprosy.

ii. The bacterium was discovered by Norwegian physician Gerhard Armauer Hansen on February 28, 1873.

About Leprosy:

i. Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is one of the oldest diseases which was named after Norwegian physician **Gerhard Henrik Armauer Hansen**, who proved that leprosy was not inherited, but was actually caused by bacteria.

- It is a chronic condition caused by the bacterium **Mycobacterium leprae**, which primarily affects the skin, peripheral nerves, eyes, and upper respiratory tract.

ii. The disease has a long incubation period, often taking 5 to 20 years for symptoms to appear.

iii. **Transmission:** Leprosy spreads through droplets from the nose and mouth during close contact with untreated individuals.

iv. **Treatable and Curable:** Leprosy is curable with Multidrug Therapy (MDT), which has been provided free of charge by the WHO since 1995.

Points to Note:

i. India has achieved the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem as per WHO criteria of less than 1 case per 10,000 population at the National level in 2005.

ii. According to WHO, Leprosy is a Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) that continues to affect over 120 countries worldwide, with more than 200,000 new cases reported annually.

About World Health Organization (WHO):

Director-General (**DG**)-Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland

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International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust 2025 – January 27

The United Nations (UN's) **International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust** (International Holocaust Remembrance Day) is observed annually on **27 January** across the globe to honor the memory of victims of the Holocaust, also known as the Shoah.

- The theme of International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust 2025 is, **"Holocaust remembrance for Dignity and Human Rights."**

Background:

i. On November 1, 2005, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution A/RES/60/7, and proclaimed January 27 as an annual 'International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust'.

ii. The 1st International Holocaust Remembrance Day was observed on January 27, **2006**.

About United Nations (UN):

Secretary-General **(SG)**– António Guterres

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Established – 1945

The United Nations (UN's) **International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust** (International Holocaust Remembrance Day) is observed annually on **27 January** across the globe to honor the memory of victims of the Holocaust, also known as the Shoah.

- **Shoah** was the genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II, primarily targeted European Jews, resulting in the loss of 6 million Jewish lives.
- The theme of International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust 2025 is, **"Holocaust remembrance for Dignity and Human Rights."**

Background:

i. On November 1, **2005**, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution A/RES/60/7, and proclaimed January 27 as an annual 'International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust'.

- The 1st International Holocaust Remembrance Day was observed on January 27, **2006**.

ii. It also established the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme to deepen understanding of the Holocaust's lessons in the context of the UN's work for peace and human rights.

iii. The commemoration serves as a reminder of the need to uphold human rights, dignity, and the values of tolerance and mutual respect across the globe.

Significance:

i. January 27 also marks the anniversary of the liberation of the 'Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi German Concentration and Extermination Camp' by Soviet troops which took place on **January 27, 1945**.

- January 27, 2025 marks the observance of the **80th anniversary** of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi German Concentration and Extermination Camp.

About Holocaust:

i. The Holocaust (1933-1945) was the organized, state-backed persecution and slaughter of 6 million Jews across Europe by Nazi Germany, along with its allies and collaborators.

ii. This Holocaust era began in January 1933 when **Adolf Hitler** and the Nazi Party assumed power in Germany, and it ended in May 1945 with the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Allied Powers in World War II.

iii. The Holocaust is also referred to as "the Shoah," a Hebrew term meaning "catastrophe."

2025 Events:

On the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) organized a series of events on **23 January 2024** in Paris, France. The events include:

i.A Symposium titled **"As the Witnesses Fall Silent"** was conducted in collaboration with the United States (US) Holocaust Memorial Museum, the United States of America (USA), exploring the role of young generations in preserving the memory of the Holocaust.

ii."**Campus XL**" **Session:** Around 300 students attended which was organized in partnership with the Mission for the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings.

iii.**Exhibitions: 'Beyond the Abyss':** A powerful photography exhibit by Olivier Mériel displayed on UNESCO's outer fences, in partnership with the Shoah Memorial, Paris, France.

iv.'**Timeless Treasures**': This exhibition, curated by Xavier Bourgois and Christophe Viseux, showcased the Jewish cultural heritage through the lens of various photographers.

UN Events:

i.The UN Holocaust Memorial Ceremony was held at the UNGA Hall in New York, the USA and was hosted by **Melissa Fleming**, the UN Secretary-General (SG) under Global Communications.

ii.The event featured testimonies from Holocaust survivors and included speeches from notable figures such as the UN Secretary-General, the President of the 79th session of the General Assembly, and various representatives from Member States.

About United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

Director-General (**DG**)– Audrey Azoulay

Headquarters- Paris, France

Established – 1945

About United Nations (UN):

Secretary-General (**SG**)– António Guterres

Headquarters- New York, the United States of America (USA)

Established – 1945

STATE NEWS

"Samman Sanjeevani" App launched in Haryana on National Girl Child Day

Shruti Choudhry, the Women & Child Development (WCD), Irrigation & Water Resources Minister, Government of Haryana, launched the '**Samman Sanjeevani**' app for the '**Mahila Evam Kishori Samman Yojana**' in Chandigarh, **Haryana** on National Girl Child Day, January 24, 2025.

- The app ensures timely delivery of services by collecting beneficiary data and updating monthly benefits.
- It will track the scheme's facilities to make sure beneficiaries receive their benefits on time.

i. Under the 'Mahila Evam Kishori Samman Yojana,' sanitary napkins are distributed to women and girls aged 10 to 45 years from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.

ii. These benefits are provided through Anganwadi centers and schools.

iii. The Minister also highlighted that the WCD Department is celebrating the **10th** anniversary of the '**Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**' scheme, with various programs planned to promote women's empowerment and raise awareness about the importance of daughters.

30th JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

76th Republic Day of India- 26 January 2025

India celebrated its **76th Republic Day** (R-day) on **26 January 2025** with great patriotism. The Republic Day parades and events took place at **Kartavya Path** (formerly known as Rajpath) in New Delhi, Delhi. Republic Day **commemorates** the **adoption** of the **Constitution of India**, which came into effect on 26 January 1950, making India a sovereign, democratic, and republic nation.

- **President of India, Droupadi Murmu**, unfurled the National Flag, followed by the National Anthem and a 21-gun salute using 105-millimeter (mm) Light Field Guns, an indigenously made weapon.

Theme of the Republic Day 2025:

The 76th Republic Day celebrations, themed '**Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas,**' (Golden India: Heritage and Development) highlighted India's military strength, cultural heritage, and development.

About the Chief Guest:

The President of Indonesia, **Prabowo Subianto**, was the Chief Guest for the 76th Republic Day celebrations, marking him as the fourth Indonesian leader to be invited for this honor.

About the 76th Republic Day Parade: The ceremony began with a visit from Prime Minister (PM) of India, Narendra Modi. The **parade was led** by Lieutenant (Lt.) General Bhavnish Kumar, General Officer Commanding, Delhi Area.

i. Group Captain Alok Ahlawat led the Mi-17 1V helicopters from the 129 Helicopter Unit, which showered flower petals in the Dhvaj Formation

ii. A highlight of the parade was a **148-member all-women marching contingent** from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

iii. A 160-member marching contingent and a 190-member band contingent **from Indonesia** participated in the Republic Day parade.

iv. The event also featured **300 cultural artists performing** the patriotic song '**Sare Jahan Se Achha**' using traditional instruments like shehnai, sundari, nadaswaram, been, mashak been, and ransingha.

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i.A highlight of the parade was a **148-member all-women marching contingent** from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

ii.A 160-member marching contingent and a 190-member band contingent **from Indonesia** participated in the Republic Day parade.

Highlights of Awards:

President Confers 942 Awards on Defence Personnel:

During the Republic Day 2025 event, a total of 942 personnel from the Police, Fire, Home Guard & Civil Defence (HG&CD), and Correctional Services were awarded Gallantry and Service Medals.

- It is important to note that the Government of India has simplified the award system by combining 16 different gallantry and service medals into four main categories. These are President's Medals for Distinguished Service (PSM), Gallantry Medals (GM), Medals for Meritorious Service (MSM), State wise/ force wise Medals

Breakup of Medals Given on Republic Day 2025:

Name of the Medals	Number of Awardees
Gallantry Medals (GM)	95
President's Medals for Distinguished Service (PSM)	101
Medals for Meritorious Service (MSM)	746

About the Awards:

i.The GM is awarded to individuals who perform acts of exceptional bravery, such as saving lives or property, preventing crimes, or capturing criminals, with consideration of the risk involved in relation to their duties.

ii.The PSM is awarded for extraordinary service, MSM recognizes outstanding contributions marked by dedication and responsibility

Key Points:

i Among the **95 Gallantry Medals**, 28 were given to personnel from Left Wing Extremism-affected areas, 28 from Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), 3 from the North-East, and 36 from other regions for their acts of courage.

[Click here for official list of gallantry medals](#)

ii. Out of **101 PSM**, 85 were awarded to Police Service, 5 to Fire Service, 7 to Civil Defence & Home Guard, and 4 to Correctional Service.

[Click here for official list of PSM](#)

iii For the **746 MSM**, 634 went to Police Service, 37 to Fire Service, 39 to Civil Defence & Home Guard, and 36 to Correctional Service.

[Click here for official list of MSM](#)

[Click here for official list of State wise/Force wise medals](#)

iv. President approves the Jeevan Raksha Padak Awards:

The President of India approved the Jeevan Raksha Padak Series of Awards – 2024 for 49 individuals, including 17 recipients of Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak, 9 of Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak, and 23 of Jeevan Raksha Padak. Among them, six awards were given posthumously.

Break-up of Awards Jeevan Raksha Padak Awards 2024:

Awards	Number of Awardees
Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak	17
Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak	9
Jeevan Raksha Padak	23

[Click here for full list of Jeevan Raksha Padak 2024](#)

About the Jeevan Raksha Padak:

The awards were established in 1961. These awards recognize acts of bravery where individuals risk their lives to save others. Each recipient receives a medal, a certificate and a monetary reward.

The awards are given in three categories:

i.Sarvottam Jeevan Raksha Padak – Awarded for extraordinary courage in saving lives when the rescuer faces extreme danger.

Monetary allowance: Rs 2 lakh

ii.Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak – Given for significant bravery in rescuing lives under great risk.

Monetary allowance: Rs 1.5 lakh

iii Jeevan Raksha Padak – Conferred for notable courage in life-saving efforts under dangerous circumstances.

Monetary allowance: Rs 1 lakh

The President approved the President's Tatrakshak Medal (PTM) and Tatrakshak Medal (TM) for eight Indian Coast Guard (ICG) personnel on the 76th Republic Day.

- Since January 26, 1990, these awards have been presented every year on Republic Day to recognize the courage and commitment of ICG personnel in safeguarding India's maritime borders.

Medal	Recipient
President's Tatrakshak Medal (Distinguished Service) (PTM)	Additional Director General (ADG) Anil Kumar Harbola, Inspector General (IG) Homesh Kumar Sharma
Tatrakshak Medal (Gallantry) (TM)	Commandant (Comdt) Anshuman Raturi – Assistant Commandant (Asst Comdt) Manish Singh – Sameer Ranjan, Uttam Navik (U/Nvk)
Tatrakshak Medal (Meritorious Service) (TM)	Inspector General (IG) Jyotindra Singh, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Atul Joshi, Shanmugham Sankar, Pradhan Adhikari (P/Adh)

President approves 58 Mentioned-in-Despatches awards

President Murmu approved 58 Mentioned-in-Despatches awards for **Armed Forces personnel**, including **four posthumous** awards. These awards honor courage, dedication, and exceptional service in various military operations.

i.The Indian Army (**IA**) received **55 awards**, including 14 for Operation Rakshak (with four posthumous), 8 for Operation Snow Leopard, 6 for Operation Hifazat, 2 for Operation Sahayta, 1 each for Operations Rhino, Meghdoot, Mulkhyama, Reconnaissance, Zokhawthar, and Falcon, 2 for Operation Gurihajan, 4 for Operation Casualty Evacuation (CAS Evacuation), 1 for Internal Security (IS) Duty, and 12 for Miscellaneous Operations.

ii.The Indian Air Force (**IAF**) received 3 awards for Operation Sankalp.

[Click here for official list](#)

The President approved Gallantry awards to 93 Armed Forces and Central Armed Police Forces personnel, including 12 posthumous. These include two Kirti Chakras, including one posthumous; 14 Shaurya Chakras, including three posthumous; one Bar to Sena Medal (Gallantry); 66 Sena Medals, including seven posthumous; two Nao Sena Medal (Gallantry) and eight Vayu Sena Medals (Gallantry), including one posthumous.

[Click here to see full list](#)

31 Tableaux and First-Ever Tri-Services Tableau at Kartavya Path on Republic Day

This year, 31 tableaux from 16 states and Union Territories (UTs) and 10 ministries and departments of the Central Government (CG) **displayed the theme** 'Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas', showcasing India's diverse heritage and its forward-moving, inclusive growth.

i. For the first time, a Tri-services tableau was featured at Kartavya Path, representing the coordinated efforts of the three branches of India's armed forces.

ii. Haryana's tableau focused on the **Bhagavad Gita**, and Uttar Pradesh's (UP) tableau highlighted the ongoing **Mahakumbh 2025**.

iii. The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (**MNRE**) showcased a captivating tableau at the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path. The display focused on India's progress in renewable energy (RE).

[Click here for full details about the tableau](#)

Points to Note:

i.For the **first time**, **three government school bands**, including two all-girl teams, performed at the 76th Republic Day parade, captivating the audience. These school bands were part of the 16 teams that competed in the National School Band Competition held on January 24-25 at Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, New Delhi.

ii.The **Sinhtoo dance**, a traditional folk dance from the Hatti community of Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh (HP) was showcased for the first time at the Republic Day celebrations. The name "Sinhtoo" means "**lion cub**" in the Pahari dialect

- Around 200 artists performed, with lion masks central to the performance, symbolizing wildlife conservation.

iii.The Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**) based in New Delhi showcased its innovations for national security through its tableau, highlighting major achievements of 2024.

A key attraction was the **Pralay missile**, a short-range tactical missile developed in India, which was displayed for the first time.

National School Band Competition Prizes Awarded during 76th Republic Day Celebrations

During the 76th Republic Day Celebrations (RDC), **Sanjay Seth**, Minister of State (MoS), Ministry of Defence (MoD) **awarded prizes to the winners of the National School Band Competition** on January 25, 2025 in New Delhi.

Culmination of India's 76th Republic Day Celebrations with Beating Retreat Ceremony

The grand finale of 76th Republic Day celebrations took place on 29 January, 2025 with the Beating Retreat ceremony at Vijay Chowk, New Delhi.

Union Ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat Jointly launched Various Initiatives ahead of 1st WAVES in Delhi

In January 2025, Union Minister **Ashwini Vaishnaw**, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (**MIB**) and Union Minister **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Ministry of Tourism (MoT) and Ministry of Culture (MoC), jointly launched various initiatives such as: **WAVES Bazaar; 3 Create in India Challenges; WAVES Awards**, among others at the National Media Centre in New Delhi, Delhi.

- These initiatives were launched ahead of the 1st World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (**WAVES**) scheduled to be held from February 5 to February 9, 2025 at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi.

i. During the event, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishanaw also announced a new challenges aimed to promote films that explore India's rich tourism and cultural heritage. These challenges aim to promote creativity, innovation, and international participation.

ii. WAVES Bazaar, an e-Marketplace, designed to bring together creators, buyers, collaborators from across different sectors such as film, Television (TV), music and firms dealing in creative content at one platform.

iii. As per MIB, WAVES Awards will start with nominations opening on February 15, 2025. The awards feature categories like: Game of the Year, Film of the Year, and Advertising Campaign of the Year.

About Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB):

Union Minister- Ashwini Vaishnaw (Rajya Sabha member- Odisha)

Minister of State (MoS)- Loganathan Murugan (Rajya Sabha member- Madhya Pradesh, MP)

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Key People:

Sanjay Jaju, Secretary, MIB; Arunish Chawla, Secretary, MoC; Filmmaker Shekhar Kapur and Gaurav Dwivedi, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Prasar Bharati, among others were also present at the launch.

Key Initiatives Launched:

About WAVES Bazaar: Harnessing the potential of creative economy:

i.It is an e-Marketplace, designed to bring together creators, buyers, collaborators from across different sectors such as film, Television (TV), music and firms dealing in creative content at one platform.

- It aims to connect India's vast creative talent pool with global markets.

ii.The platform will enable users to showcase their content, pitch projects and engage in meaningful Business-to-Business (**B2B**) interactions that transcend geographical boundaries.

About 3 New Challenges under Create in India Challenges(CIC):

The main highlight of the event was the launch of 3 new challenges i.e. "Wah Ustad", "Make The World Wear Khadi" and "Resonate: The EDM Challenge", under CIC.

i.Wah Ustad: This challenge is conceptualized by the MIB, driven by the '**Dilli Gharana**' in partnership with the Ministry of Culture (MoC) and Doordarshan. It will provide a platform for young, classically trained vocalists to display their exceptional skills.

- This challenge is open for participants aged 18 years and above, including international participation.
- It is a **two-phased** competition culminating in a Grand National finale at WAVES 2025 whose registrations have been opened on the website of [Prasar Bharti](#).

ii. Make The World Wear Khadi: This challenge is designed to invite advertising professionals and freelancers to develop innovative campaigns that help to position Khadi as an international brand.

- This challenge is open for international participation, which aims to promote Khadi within India and globally.
- The participants are required to explore innovative design concepts across different formats (example: digital, print, video, and experiential).

iii. Resonate: The EDM Challenge: It is hosted by the Indian Music Association (**IMA**). The challenge invites artists, composers, musicians, and performers from around the globe to showcase their exceptional talent in Electronic Dance Music (EDM) production. All nationalities are allowed to participate in this challenge.

About Create in India Challenges(CIC):

i. CIC, part of the WAVES, a flagship initiative by the MIB. It has witnessed over 70,000 registrations and counting.

iii. Till date, 31 Create in India Challenges have been launched out of which 25 are still open for registration with 22 attracting international participation.

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About WAVES Awards:

i. As per MIB, WAVES Awards will start with nominations opening on February 15, 2025 .

ii. The awards feature categories like: Game of the Year, Film of the Year, and Advertising Campaign of the Year. It also features Special Selection Awards, honouring lifetime achievements and significance in various fields such as: technology and social influence.

About Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB):

Union Minister- Ashwini Vaishnaw (Rajya Sabha member- Odisha)

Minister of State (MoS)- Loganathan Murugan (Rajya Sabha member- Madhya Pradesh, MP)

DGFT Launched Enhanced 'eCoO 2.0 System' to Boost Trade Efficiency

In January 2025, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (**DGFT**) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoC&I) has launched the enhanced Certificate of Origin (**eCoO 2.0 System**) to simplify the certification process for exporters and improve trade efficiency, with features like multi-user access under a single Importer Exporter Code (IEC).

- Starting from 1st January 2025, electronic filing of Non-Preferential CoO is mandatory through the eCoO 2.0 platform, accessible to exporters via <https://trade.gov.in>.

About enhanced Certificate of Origin (eCoO) 2.0 System:

- i. The platform handles more than 7,000 eCoOs daily, including both preferential and non-preferential certificates, connecting 125 issuing agencies, such as 110 national and regional chambers of commerce, over 650 issuing officers, and all Indian exporters in one unified system.
- ii. The initiative simplifies the certification process and speeds up processing, benefiting global supply chains that involve intermediary trade through India.
- iii. The certificates are issued based on documentary proof from the foreign country of origin and ensure transparency by clearly stating the origin details and supporting documents.

Key features of eCoO 2.0 :

- i. The system now also supports Aadhaar-based e-signing in addition to digital signature tokens, offering more flexibility.
- ii. It also introduces an **in-lieu Certificate of Origin** feature for requesting corrections to previously issued Certificates of Origin through a simple online application process.
- iii. DGFT has introduced a process for obtaining online **Back-to-Back Certificates of Origin** (Non-Preferential), which apply to goods not originally from India but intended for re-export, trans-shipment, or merchanting trade.
- iv. An integrated dashboard gives exporters easy access to eCoO services, Free Trade Agreement (FTA) details, trade events, and other resources.

About Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT):

Director General(**DG**) – Santosh Kumar Sarangi

Headquarters – New Delhi (Delhi)

Established – 1991

Tripura becomes the 1st NE State to Sign MoU with Bhashini for Multi-Lingual Governance

In January 2025, the Government of **Tripura** has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Digital India Bhashini Division (**DIBD**) of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for multi-lingual governance. The MoU was signed during a state-level workshop titled "Bhashini Rajyam", held at Pragna Bhavan in Agartala, Tripura under the guidance of Professor (Dr.) Manik Saha, Chief Minister (CM) of Tripura.

- With this, Tripura becomes the **1st** North-Eastern(NE) state, as well as **8th** Indian state to sign a MoU with Bhasha Interface for India(**Bhashini**).
- This MoU marks a significant milestone in the state's efforts to promote digital inclusivity and leveraging technology for enhanced citizen centric governance.

About Digital India Bhashini Division (DIBD):

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Amitabh Nag

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2022

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- This MoU marks a significant milestone in the state's efforts to promote digital inclusivity and leveraging technology for enhanced citizen centric governance.

Key Points:

i. Bhashini will integrate with existing systems of Tripura such as the CM Helpline, eVidhan, Kisan Sahayata application (app) and e-districts to enable multilingual communication.

- It will also enhance local governance through apps like Amar Sarkar and enhance education with multilingual technologies.

ii. It will also support the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS) platform by translating First Information Reports (FIRs) and enabling voiced-based data entry.

iii. It will help in reducing the digital divide by easing access to Internet in regional and local languages of Tripura.

About BHASHINI Initiative:

i. Bhashini, the National Language Technology Mission (NLTM), is a flagship initiative of Government of India (GoI), launched under the Digital India program in July 2022.

- It aimed to democratize access to digital content and services across the linguistic spectrum of India.

ii. It uses cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies to bridge the digital and literacy gaps by enabling internet access and communication in **22 Indian languages**.

iii. It is being implemented by **DIBD**, an independent business division under Digital India Corporation (DIC), a Section 8 Company of MeitY.

Note: In January 2025, Bhashini project was leveraged to upgrade the e-Shram portal with 22 Indian languages. Previously, the portal was available only in English, Hindi, Kannada and Marathi.

About Digital India Bhashini Division (DIBD):

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Amitabh Nag

Headquarters- New Delhi, Delhi

Established- 2022

About Tripura:

Chief Minister (**CM**)- Professor (Dr.) Manik Saha

Governor- N Indrasena Reddy

Capital- Agartala

National Parks (**NPs**) – Clouded Leopard NP, Bison NP

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

55th Annual Meeting of WEF held in Switzerland from January 20– 24, 2025: Part II

The **55th** Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (**WEF 2025**) was held, with the theme "**Collaboration for the Intelligent Age**", from January 20 to 24, 2025 in Davos-Klosters, **Switzerland**.

i.The Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (**C4IR**) **India**, liaison office of WEF in India, launched its 6-year [Impact journey report](#) during the WEF Annual meeting 2025.

ii.During the meeting, the **WEF**, in collaboration with New York City(the United States of America, USA) based McKinsey Health Institute(**MHI**), released a report titled '[Blueprint to Close the Women's Health Gap: How to Improve Lives and Economies for All](#)' that highlights the global health condition of women and the need to close the health gap.

iii.The **Telangana** government secured an investment of **Rs 1,78,950 crore**, which will create 49,550 jobs, on the sidelines of the WEF 2025 in Switzerland.

- The state government signed several Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs), with major focus on establishing data centres, followed by pumped storage facilities.

iv.**Maharashtra** government has signed **61** MoUs, including 54 investment proposals and 7 strategic cooperation, at WEF2025 of investment worth **Rs 15.70 lakh crore** and having the potential to provide 16 lakh jobs in the state.

About World Economic Forum(WEF):

President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- Børge Brende(Norway)

Headquarters- Cologny, Switzerland

Founded- 1971

The **55th** Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (**WEF 2025**) was held, with the theme "**Collaboration for the Intelligent Age**", from January 20 to 24, 2025 in Davos-Klosters, **Switzerland**.

Highlights of WEF 2025:

C4IR India released its Impact Journey Report:

i.The Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (**C4IR**) **India**, liaison office of WEF in India, launched its 6-year [Impact journey report](#) during the WEF Annual meeting 2025.

ii.The **C4IR** India was launched in **2018** in Mumbai(Maharashtra) with NITI(National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog and Reliance Industries as founding partners for promoting responsible and inclusive technological development.

- It has impacted the lives of 1.25 million people and aims to expand its reach to **10 million** citizens.
- The Centre is focusing on cutting-edge areas such as climate technology, and space technologies with key projects like Artificial Intelligence (**AI**) **for India 2030**, the **Space Economy initiative**, and the **AVIATE** (Aviation – Innovation Autonomy and Technology for Everyone).

iii.WEF has recognized **India** as an emerging global leader in **technological** innovation and economic growth and becoming a startup and digital innovation hub

iv.The WEF's partnership with India is over **40** years old and has made integrated efforts across government, business, academia, and civil society to make development in areas like including AI-driven agricultural programs, healthcare solutions, and sustainable urban frameworks.

India's WASH Innovations Lead Global Discourse:

i. A high-profile discussion on "**India's WASH Innovation: Driving Global Impact in Climate and Water Sustainability**" was held at the India Pavilion in WEF 2025 which highlighted India's efforts towards Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (**WASH**) and its significant role in global climate resilience and sustainable development.

ii. India's achievements through the Swachh Bharat Mission (**SBM**) (the construction of over 95 million toilets) and the Jal Jeevan Mission (**JJM**) (widespread household tap water connections) were highlighted as WASH initiatives.

iii. The session was followed by two insightful panel discussions,

- The keynote address was followed by two panel discussions: one on "**Bringing Global Impact in Water Sustainability**" and another on "**Innovation in Global Health Through Sanitation.**"
- These discussions included views from National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WaterAid, the Gates Foundation, Riseberg Ventures, and actor-advocate Vivek Oberoi on advancing water sustainability and sanitation worldwide.

iv. During the event, Union Minister C. R. Patil highlighted India's significant role in advancing the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

WEF released "Blueprint to Close the Women's Health Gap" Report :

During the meeting, the **WEF**, in collaboration with New York City (the United States of America, USA) based McKinsey Health Institute (**MHI**), released a report titled '[Blueprint to Close the Women's Health Gap: How to Improve Lives and Economies for All](#)' that highlights the global health condition of women and the need to close the health gap.

Highlights:

- i. The report projected that addressing key women-specific health challenges could contribute **USD 400 billion** in global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually by **2040**.
- ii. The report also emphasizes that women spend **25%** more of their lives in poor health as compared to men.
- iii. It has highlighted **9 key health conditions** to be focused upon which could reduce the global disease burden by **27 million** disability-adjusted life years and equally add **2.5 healthy days** per woman each year.
 - **Five** of these conditions are related to the **total number** of years lived – maternal hypertensive disorders, postpartum hemorrhage, ischemic heart disease, cervical cancer, and breast cancer.
 - **Four** conditions show focus on how many of those years are lived in **good health** – endometriosis, menopause, migraine, and premenstrual syndrome.
- v. The report has introduced Women's Health Impact Tracking (**WHIT**) platform, which will be used to measure and track health gaps for women.

It emphasizes **five** key actions to be undertaken-

- **Count women** – globally collect data to measure women's health and health outcomes
- **Study women** – understanding hormonal health and women's biology
- **Care for women** – implement clinical practice guidelines for women-specific conditions
- **Include all women** – develop ways for early treatment for women around the world
- **Invest in women** – promote financing for women's health research and interventions

India Secures USD 250 Million Investment from Belgium's AB InBev

During the WEF 2025, Union Minister for Food Processing Industries (MoFPI), Chirag Paswan, announced that Belgium based **AB InBev** will provide India with an investment of **USD 250 million** for developing its **beverage sector**, which will span over the next two to three years.

- States like Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh(UP), and regions in South India are set to benefit from these investments

Telangana secures Rs.1.78 lakh crore investments :

The **Telangana** government secured an investment of **Rs 1,78,950 crore**, which will create 49,550 jobs, on the sidelines of the WEF 2025 in Switzerland.

- The state government signed several Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs), with major focus on establishing data centres, followed by pumped storage facilities.

MoUs signed by Telangana Government:

Company	Investment	Purpose
Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited (MEIL)	Rs.15000 crore	<p>i.A state-of-the-art 2160 Megawatt (MW) Pumped Storage Project worth Rs.11000 crore, to strengthen Telangana’s renewable energy capabilities.</p> <p>ii.Establishment of 1,000-Megawatt Hour (MWh) Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at various strategic locations across the state Rs.3,000 crore.</p> <p>iii.Development of a luxury wellness resort at Ananthagiri worth Rs.1000 crore</p>
Skyroot Aerospace Private Limited	Rs.500 crore	Establishment of an integrated private rocket manufacturing, integration and testing facility in Telangana.
JSW UAV Limited	Rs. 800 crore	To set up a facility in the state for manufacturing Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAV) through the use of technology of a leading US-based defense technology company.

Sun Petrochemicals Private Limited	Rs.45,500 crore	To establish three Pumped Storage Hydro Power projects in the districts of Nagarkurnool, Mancherial, and Mulugu in Telangana. These projects will have a combined capacity of 3,400 MW accompanied by 5,440 MW downstream integrated solar power plants.
Akshat Greentech Private Limited	Rs.7000 crore	Set up a 6.9 GW solar cells and 6.9 GW solar modules manufacturing unit in Hyderabad and is expected to create over 2,500 direct jobs
Amazon Web Services (AWS)	Rs 60,000 crore	To expand its data centre infrastructure in Telangana
Tillman Global Holdings(TGH)	Rs 15,000 crores	To invest in a 300 MW hyperscale data center facility in Telangana.
CtrlS Datacenters Limited	Rs 10,000 crores	For the establishment of an AI data center cluster with a capacity of 400 megawatt (MW).
Ursa Clusters	Rs 5,000 crore	To establish a 100 MW AI-powered data centre hub in Hyderabad.
Blackstone Inc.,	Rs 4,500 crore	To develop a 150MW data centre facility in Hyderabad.

Others:

i.The Ramky Group decided to invest in integrated industrial parks, a dry port and townships, while the MTS Group LLC also committed significant investments.

ii.Software majors such as Infosys Limited (17,000 jobs), HCL Technologies Limited(5,000) and Wipro Limited(5,000) unveiled their plans for expansions in Hyderabad, Telangana.

Maharashtra sign 61 MoUs worth Rs 15.70 lakh crore

Maharashtra government has signed **61** MoUs, including 54 investment proposals and 7 strategic cooperation, at WEF2025 of investment worth **Rs 15.70 lakh crore** and having the potential to provide 16 lakh jobs in the state.

- The sectors include artificial intelligence (AI), data, green energy, hydrogen, and water conservation.

MoUs signed by Maharashtra:

Company	Investment	Purpose
Amazon Web Services(AWS)	Rs.71,795 crore	To set up a data centre.
Hiranandani Group	Rs.51,600 crore	For the infrastructure Project.
Paras Defence & Space Technologies Limited	Rs 12,000 crore	i.Establishment of country's first optics park in Maharashtra. ii.The project is expected to start in 2028 and will continue till 2035. iii.It will also create a technology hub for defence, space, automotive, semiconductor and other applications.
Essar Renewables Limited (ERL)	Rs.8,000 crore	i.Develop 2 Gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy capacity for its green mobility initiative. Support the Electric Vehicle truck charging ecosystem of Blue Energy Motors and Greenline. ii.The projects will start in the fiscal year 2026-27.

<p>JSW Group</p>	<p>Rs.3 trillion</p>	<p>i.Investment made in 3 regions of Maharashtra including naxal-infested Gadchiroli.</p> <p>ii.The investments will include integrating steel manufacturing capacities with clean green technology, green energy projects, advanced manufacturing units for new-age electric vehicles and high-performance EV batteries and strengthening the solar energy ecosystem.</p>
<p>Salam Kisan</p>	<p>Rs.300 crore</p>	<p>i.Invest in 'Drone-as-a-Service' (DaaS) initiative over the next seven years which will involve manufacturing drones, setting up training centres and creating a network of 2,00,000 trained Drone Service Providers (DSPs).</p> <p>ii.Maharashtra will co-invest Rs 300 crore to support infrastructure and training in Marathwada.</p> <p>iii.Aim to integrate drone technology into farming practices, covering 5 million acres annually by 2030.</p> <p>iv.Microsoft will act as a technology partner providing Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning and cloud computing solutions in agricultural practices.</p>

Tembo Defence Products Private Limited	Rs1,000 crore	To strengthen defense sector in Maharashtra by building strong defense infrastructure. To generate 300 new job opportunities.
Taural India Private Limited	Rs. 500 crores	i.To expand the company’s modern manufacturing facility in Supa, Ahilya Nagar, Maharashtra. ii.Help to boost industrial growth and create job opportunities.
Economic Explosives Limited	Rs.12,780 crores	i.Develop an Anchor Mega Project. ii.It falls under the “Thrust Sector Incentive Scheme” of the Maharashtra government iii.Inlcudes increase of defence products such as Propellant, War head explosives, Ammunitions, Defence electronics, Drones and UAVs, New Generation Explosives, Energetic binders and new products such as Military transport aircraft.

<p style="text-align: center;">Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">USD 40 billion (around Rs 3.5 lakh crore)</p>	<p>i. Crossrail International (UK) and University of Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education (UK) – Strategic study to optimise and to achieve sustainable urban transport in MMR.</p> <p>ii. Brookfield Corporation (Canada) (USD 12 billion), Blackstone Inc. (USA) (USD 5 billion), Temasek Capital Management (Singapore) (USD 5 billion) and Sumitomo Realty & Development (Japan) (USD 5 billion) – for urban, regional, and infrastructure development.</p> <p>iii. Hiranandani Group (India + Dubai) (USD 6 billion), K Raheja Corp Pvt. Ltd. (India + Singapore) (USD 5 billion), Everstone Group (Singapore) (USD 1 billion)- investment to boost the economy.</p> <p>iv. Sotefin Bharat Pvt. Ltd. (India + Switzerland) – USD 1 billion investment to improve parking solutions in the region.</p> <p>v. MTC Business Pvt. Ltd. + Mitsui (India + Japan) – Develop a Circular Economy Park in MMR</p>
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Others:

- Other companies that have decided to invest in Infrastructure sector are Blackstone Inc (Rs.43,000 crore), Temasek Capital Management Pte. Ltd. (Rs.43,000 crore), K Raheja Corporation (Rs.43,000 crore) and Sumitomo Realty & Development Company Limited, a leading comprehensive real estate developer in Japan, which will also invest Rs.43,000 crore.
- Reliance Group, which has committed Rs.3.05 lakh crore for investments across petrochemicals, polyester, renewable energy, bioenergy, green hydrogen, green chemicals, retail, telecommunications, data centers, industrial development, hospitality, and real estate.
- One of the key agreements includes MSN Holdings Ltd, which plans to establish an advanced lithium battery and cell manufacturing project under the state's 'Ultra Mega Project' initiative. The project, requiring an investment of Rs.14,652 crore.

[Click Here to View part I of Highlights of WEF 2025](#)

About World Economic Forum(WEF):

President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- Børge Brende(Norway)

Headquarters- Cologny, Switzerland

Founded- 1971

BANKING & FINANCE

Mobikwik becomes India's 1st Fintech Company to Roll out CBDC in Partnership with RBI and Yes Bank

In January 2025, Gurugram (Haryana)-based **One Mobikwik Systems Limited**, has become 1st fintech company in India, to roll out a full-scale Central Bank Digital Currency (**CBDC**) or e-rupee, in collaboration with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Yes Bank Limited.

- As per this strategic partnership, **Yes Bank Limited** will act as a primary **sponsor bank** to provide the issuance of the CBDC for both these 3rd-party application providers.

Note: CBDC is a digital legal tender issued and supported by the RBI. This digital currency is equivalent to sovereign currency and can be exchanged at a one-to-one ratio with existing physical currency.

Key Points:

- i.** Now, this e-rupee wallet is accessible to all Android users of Mobikwik, which will enable seamless Peer-to-Peer (**P2P**) and Peer-to-Merchant (**P2M**) transactions.
- ii.** Users can now pay by scanning any Unified Payments Interface (**UPI**) Quick Response (QR) code using e-rupee, as the wallet is completely compatible with UPI.
- iii.** Existing users of Mobikwik who have completed their Know Your Customer (KYC) formalities can instantly open e-rupee wallets and make transactions from their bank accounts.
- iv.** The wallet allows maximum transactions of **Rs 50,000 per day**, with per transaction limit of Rs 10,000. It supports denominations ranging from Rs 0.50 to Rs 500.

Background:

i. It was initially launched on December 01, 2022, as a pilot project for the e-rupee retail segment (e-R) with 4 banks: State Bank of India (SBI), ICICI Bank Limited, Yes Bank Limited and IDFC First Bank in 4 Indian cities.

iii. In April 2024, RBI allowed non-bank entities to offer digital currency transactions through CBDC.

- According to the RBI, at present, 15 banks including, SBI, Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited (KMBL), Axis Bank Limited, HDFC Bank Limited, among others, offer CBDC wallets.
- While, 14 participants, which includes both bank and non-bank entities, in the wholesale CBDC pilot.

iv. In January 2025, Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based Cred, backed by Tiger Global and Peak XV, launched the beta version of its e-wallet, developed in partnership with the RBI and Yes Bank as the sponsor bank.

About One Mobikwik Systems Limited:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- Bipin Preet Singh

Headquarters- Gurugram, Haryana

Established- 2009

RBL Bank & Piramal Finance Partner to offer Co-Lending Business

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **RBL Bank Limited** (formerly known as Ratnakar Bank Limited) and Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Limited** (also known as Piramal Finance), a wholly subsidiary of Piramal Enterprises Limited (**PEL**), announced a partnership aimed at enhancing financial inclusion.

- This is the **3rd co-lending** partnership for Piramal Finance, following similar collaborations with Axis Bank Limited and the Central Bank of India (CBI) Limited.

i. This collaboration aims to provide **loans** to middle and low-income borrowers in rural and semi-urban areas, with a focus on Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets.

ii. The primary goal is to provide competitive interest rates and customized credit solutions for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (**MSMEs**) and home loan borrowers.

iii. This collaboration combines RBL Bank's financial expertise and branch network with Piramal Finance's innovative 'High Tech + High Touch' approach, offering competitive interest rates and customised credit solutions to underserved communities.

PNB unveils 1st-ever real time NCRP Solution for Cybercrime

In January 2025, New Delhi (Delhi) based Punjab National Bank (**PNB**) Limited became the **1st Indian bank** to unveil real time Clari5's National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (**NCRP**) Integration Solution.

- It was introduced in partnership with the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (**I4C**), making PNB a leader in both banking and cybersecurity.
- This solution is designed to improve fraud prevention and automate complaint management.

i. Clari5's NCRP Integration Solution **enhances fraud prevention** with automation across various banking channels, including Internet Banking, Mobile Banking, Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), Debit Cards, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), etc.

ii. The key Features include Real-Time Lien, First In, First Out (FIFO) Logic for faster complaint resolution, Intelligent Debit Freeze, and Whitelisting for account protection.

Note: Bengaluru(Karnataka) based CustomerXPs Software Private Limited founded in 2006. It sells its financial crime risk management software product under the brand name Clari5.

Paytm Launches 'Receive Money QR Widget' for Android users

On January 28 2025, Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP) based **Paytm**, subsidiary of One97 Communications Limited(OCL), launched the '**Receive Money Quick Response (QR) Widget**' for android users, enabling them to receive payments directly from their smartphone's home screen without the need to open the Paytm application (app).

- Paytm, became the **1st company** to launch this new feature.This was previously launched for iPhone users.
- This new widget streamlines and accelerates the payment collection process for influencers, freelancers, shopkeepers, delivery partners, and small businesses to receive money quickly and efficiently.

Nakul Jain Announces Resignation as MD & CEO from PPSL:

In January 2025, **Nakul Jain** announced his resignation as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Paytm Payments Services Limited (**PPSL**), a subsidiary of OCL to pursue his own entrepreneurial journey.

- His resignation will take effect on **March 31, 2025**, at the close of business or an earlier mutually agreed date.

i.Nakul Jain joined PPSL in 2022 as an in-charge of the Online Payments business. He has more than **21 years** of experience in areas like retail banking, product management, wealth management, international banking, and payments.

ii.Prior to joining Paytm, he was part of the Management Team at Standard Chartered Bank.

iii.He also held leadership positions at ICICI Bank Limited and IndusInd Bank Limited.

Points to Note:

i.In August 28 2024, PPSL received approval from the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance (MoF) for downstream investment from Paytm into the subsidiary company PPSL.

ii.PPSL has already made an application for Payment Aggregator (PA) licence from the RBI and is awaiting approval.

About Paytm:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Vijay Shekhar Sharma

Headquarters– Noida, Uttar Pradesh (UP)

Established– 2010

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

India's AionOS signs MoU with Indosat to boost Indonesia's AI growth

In January 2025, New Delhi (Delhi) based **AionOS** India Private Limited signed a Memorandum of Understanding (**MoU**) with Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison (**Indosat or IOH**), a leading Indonesian digital telecommunications company to transform Indonesia's Artificial Intelligence (AI) ecosystem.

- This partnership marks the **1st large scale** AI-focused collaboration between India and Indonesia, under the visionary, Government-to-Government (G2G) initiative.
- The MoU aims to harness the potential of AI to fuel innovation, stimulate economic growth, and drive socio-cultural transformation in Indonesia.

Note: AionOS, founded in April 2024, is a joint venture between InterGlobe and Assago Group, focused on transforming businesses into AI-driven enterprises.

Key Areas :

The collaboration focuses on AI³ (AI for Indonesia and India), an initiative powered by Indosat and AionOS aimed at reshaping Indonesia's digital economy using AI technology.

i.Transformative Solutions: AI³ aims to create transformative solutions, in areas like tourism, knowledge economy, and sustainable agriculture, driving innovations to strengthen Indonesia's global networks.

ii.Knowledge Economy Development: The partnership will collaborate with top educational institutions to build an AI-skilled workforce, strengthening Indonesia's position in the knowledge economy.

iii.Sustainable Food Security: AI³ will use AI to boost agricultural productivity, improve climate resilience, and support local farmers, enhancing food security across Indonesia..

Key Points:

i.Indosat and AionOS will also establish a Centre of Excellence(CoE) in Jakarta (Indonesia) in collaboration with a China-based company, **DeepSeek** that focuses on AI technology.

ii.In January 2025, DeepSeek launched its open-source AI model, **DeepSeek-R1**, designed to compete with major players like **OpenAI**, offering advanced capabilities in areas such as mathematical reasoning and code generation.

About Indonesia:

President- Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo

Capital- Jakarta

Currency- Indonesian Rupiah (**IDR**)

SEBI Unveils 'Dharohar': A Digital Repository for India's Securities Market

On January 26, 2025, during India's 76th Republic Day celebrations, Mumbai, Maharashtra based Securities and Exchange Board of India (**SEBI**) unveiled '**Dharohar – Milestones in the Indian Securities Market**,' a digital knowledge repository.

- This initiative highlights SEBI's commitment to preserving India's securities market legacy while enhancing awareness and understanding among diverse stakeholders.
- This is designed for a broad audience, including students, investors, researchers, journalists, market participants, and the general public.

i.Dharohar documents the 150-year history and evolution of the Indian securities market, showcasing its diverse products, participants, and institutions.

ii.It includes a website with an interactive timeline of significant events and three-dimensional (3D) galleries, providing an engaging experience for visitors.

iii.It currently contains over 3,000 assets, including articles, regulatory evolution, interviews with notable personalities, historic newspaper clippings, share certificates, infographics, videos, committee reports, and more.

iv.It is set to expand, with new content being added regularly to enhance its value for users.

v.Users can access the Dharohar repository at <https://www.mism.org>

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

ICC Awards 2024: India's Bumrah, Smriti ,and Arshdeep Singh Win ICC Men's Cricketer , Women's ODI, and Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year Awards

The International Cricket Council (ICC) announced the winners of the ICC Awards 2024, with **3 Indian cricketers** making their mark on the honours list. The ICC Awards 2024 event took place over five days, from January 24 to 28, 2025, highlighting exceptional performances across various categories.

i.India's Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah claimed the top honor 'Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy' for Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024 and the ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year 2024 respectively.

ii.Smriti Mandhana(India) was named the Women's One Day International (ODI) Cricketer of the Year 2024.

iii.Arshdeep Singh Aulakh(India) bagged ICC Men's Twenty20 International (T20I) Cricketer of the Year 2024.

iv.Amelia Kerr Charlotte(New Zealand) claimed the top honor "Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy" ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year 2024 for her outstanding performances throughout 2024.

v.Richard Keith Illingworth(England) received David Shepherd Trophy' for ICC Umpire of the Year 2024.

About International Cricket Council (ICC) Awards:

The ICC Awards recognize the top cricket performers of the year across all formats. There are 13 different categories in which these prestigious honors are awarded.

Chairman- Jay Shah

Headquarters – Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

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- India's **Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah** claimed the top honor 'Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy' for Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024 and the ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year 2024 respectively.
- **Smriti Mandhana** was named the Women's One Day International (ODI) Cricketer of the Year 2024.
- **Arshdeep Singh Aulakh** bagged ICC Men's Twenty20 International (T20I) Cricketer of the Year 2024.

Highlights of 2024 ICC Awards:

Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah: ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024

i. Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah was honoured with 2 awards namely 'Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy' for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024 and "ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year 2024" for his exceptional performance, topping the international Test cricket wicket-taking charts with 71 wickets in 13 matches at an impressive average of 14.92.

- He became the **first Indian fast bowler (Pacer)** to win this award. Prior to him, Sachin Tendulkar (2010) and Virat Kohli (2017) had won the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year award.

iii. He reached a career-high rating of 907 points in the ICC Test Bowling Rankings in 2024, making him the highest-rated Indian bowler in history.

iv. He ranked the **1st bowler** to top the ICC Test Rankings in all three formats and became the fastest Indian pacer to take 200 Test wickets, with an exceptional sub-20 bowling average, the best in history.

Smriti Mandhana – ICC Women’s ODI Cricketer of the Year 2024:

i.Smriti Mandhana was named this award for her exceptional performance in 2024 , marks the 2nd time of the ICC award, following her earlier success.

ii.She scored 747 runs in 2024, with an impressive average of 57.46, further cementing her as one of the top batters in women’s cricket.

Arshdeep Singh Aulakh – Men’s T20I Cricketer of the Year 2024

Arshdeep Singh Aulakh,the left-arm seamer was honored with this award for his exceptional performance in 2024, where he claimed 36 wickets, playing a vital role in India’s T20I success.

Amelia Kerr Charlotte (New Zealand): ICC Women’s Cricketer of the Year 2024

i. Amelia Kerr Charlotte claimed the top honor “**Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy**” ICC Women’s Cricketer of the Year 2024 for her outstanding performances throughout 2024.

ii.She scored 743 runs in 19 matches with an impressive average, establishing herself as one of the best all-rounders in women’s cricket.

iii.She was also awarded the ICC Women’s T20I Cricketer of the Year 2024, becoming the **1st Kiwi (first cricketer from New Zealand)** cricketer to win this honour.

Lists of Winners of ICC Awards 2024:

Category	Winner	Country
'Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy' for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024	Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah	India
'Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy' for ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year 2024	Amelia Charlotte Kerr	New Zealand
ICC Men's Test Cricketer of the Year 2024	Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah	India
ICC Men's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2024	Azmatullah Omarzai	Afghanistan
ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2024	Smriti Mandhana	India
ICC Emerging Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024	Pasqual Handi Kamindu Dilanka Mendis	Sri Lanka
ICC Emerging Women's Cricketer of the Year 2024	Annerie Dercksen	South Africa
ICC Men's Associate Cricketer of the Year 2024	Merwe Gerhard Erasmus	Namibia
ICC Women's Associate Cricketer of the Year 2024	Esha Oza	India
ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2024	Arshdeep Singh Aulakh	India
ICC Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year 2024	Amelia Charlotte Kerr	New Zealand
'David Shepherd Trophy' for ICC Umpire of the Year 2024	Richard Keith Illingworth	England (United Kingdom,UK)

Winners of ICC Teams of the Year 2024:

Category	Winners
ICC Men's Test Team of the Year 2024	Pat Cummins (Captain,C), Yashasvi Bhupendra Kumar Jaiswal, Ben Duckett, Kane Williamson, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Kamindu Mendis, Jamie Smith (Wicketkeeper,WK), Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah, Matt Henry, and Jasprit Bumrah
ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year 2024	Rohit Gurunath Sharma (C), Travis Michael Head , Philip Dean Salt , Mohammad Babar Azam , Nicholas Pooran (WK), Sikandar Raza, Hardik Pandya, Rashid Khan, Wanindu Hasaranga, Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumra, and Arshdeep Singh Aulakh
ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year 2024	Laura Wolvaardt (C), Smriti Mandhana, Chamari Athapaththu, Hayley Matthews, Nat Sciver-Brunt, Melie Kerr, Richa Ghosh (WK), Marizanne Kapp, Orla Prendergast, Deepti Sharma, and Sadia Iqbal
ICC Men's ODI Team of the Year 2024	Charith Asalanka (C), Saim Ayub, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Mendis (WK), Sherfane Rutherford, Azmatullah Omarzai, Wanindu Hasaranga, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, & AM Ghazanfar
ICC Women's ODI Team of the Year 2024	Laura Wolvaardt (C), Smriti Mandhana, Chamari Athapaththu, Hayley Matthews, Marizanne Kapp, Ashleigh Gardner, Annabel Sutherland, Amy Jones (WK), Deepti Sharma, Sophie Ecclestone, & Kate Cross

i. ICC Men's Test Team of the Year 2024: This team includes 11 players with Pat Cummins as the Captain who showcased exceptional performances in Test cricket in 2024 .

- Indian players Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah, Ravindrasinh Anirudhsinh Jadeja, and Yashasvi Bhupendra Kumar Jaiswal were featured in the squad.

ii. ICC Men's ODI Team of the Year 2024: Comprising 11 players, this team recognizes standout cricketers from the ODI format.

iii. ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year 2024: This team features 11 top performers from T20I cricket in 2024, with India's Rohit Gurunath Sharma as the captain.

- Other key Indian players in the squad include Jasprit Jasbirsingh Bumrah, Hardik Himanshu Pandya, and Arshdeep Singh Aulakh.

iv. ICC Women's ODI Team of the Year 2024: The squad includes 11 players, with SmritiMandhana and Deepti Sharma being key contributors from India, alongside other all-rounders in the team.

v. ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year 2024: This team comprises 11 players, with **India's SmritiMandhana**, Richa Ghosh, and Deepti Sharma featured for their outstanding performances in the T20I format.

About International Cricket Council (ICC) Awards:

The ICC Awards recognize the top cricket performers of the year across all formats. There are 13 different categories in which these prestigious honors are awarded.

Chairman- Jay Shah

Headquarters – Dubai, United Arab Emirates **(UAE)**

Founded: 1909 (for the ICC); ICC Awards introduced in 2004.

APPOINTMENTS & RESIGNATIONS

KRBL Appoints Amitabh Bachchan as Ambassador for Indian Rice Brand 'India Gate'

In January 2025, Noida(Uttar Pradesh, UP) based KRBL Limited, an Indian rice processing and exporting company, has appointed Bollywood actor **Amitabh Bachchan** as the **brand ambassador for its** flagship 'India Gate' brand.

- This decision aimed to strengthen the brand's connection with consumers and enhance its global presence in the basmati rice market.
- Amitabh Bachchan is the brand ambassador for several well-known products in India, including upGrad, FirstCry, Maggi, Kalyan Jewellers, Cadbury Dairy Milk, Parker Pens, Gujarat Tourism, ICICI Prudential Life, and Maaza.

i. KRBL Limited(formerly known as Khushi Ram Behari Lal Ltd.,) was founded in 1889 in Lyallpur,Punjab by two brothers namely Khushi Ram and Behari Lal.

ii. It is recognized as one of the world's largest rice millers. It is best known for its India Gate brand of basmati rice, which is the largest selling rice brand in India.

iii. **Anil Kumar Mittal** is the Chairman and Managing Director(MD) of KRBL Limited.

Alexander Lukashenko Wins 7th Consecutive Term as President of Belarus

In January 2025, **Alexander Lukashenko** was re-elected as **president of Belarus** for the **7th** consecutive five-year term. He received 86.8% of the vote in the presidential election.

- The Republic of Belarus was formed in 1991 shortly after declaring itself independent of the Soviet Union. Alexander Lukashenko was the first president. As of January 2025, he is the **only person** to have served as President of Belarus.
- Belarus, officially called the Republic of Belarus, is a landlocked(without coastal line) country in Eastern Europe. It shares borders with Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia.
- The capital of Belarus is Minsk and its currency is the Belarusian Ruble(BYN). **Roman Alexandrovich Golovchenko** is the Prime Minister(PM) of Belarus.

Belarusian Parliament :-

The Belarusian Parliament is also known as the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus with the total capacity of 174 member,it consists of two chambers:

- The Council of the Republic – the upper house consists of 110 members.
- The House of Representatives – the lower house consists of 64 members.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

ISRO Completes 100th Mission, GSLV-F15 Successfully Launched from Sriharikota, AP

On January 29 2025, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched **GSLV-F15/NVS-02** mission, carrying the **NVS-02 satellite**, from the Second Launched Pad (SLP) Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh (AP). With the successful launch of this mission, ISRO completed its **100th** launch from Sriharikota spaceport.

- This mission marks the **17th** flight of India's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) and **11th** flight with indigenous cryogenic stage.
- It is also the 8th operational flight of GSLV with an indigenous cryogenic stage.
- Since 1979, ISRO has conducted 99 launches with Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) carrying out 62 launches, followed by GSLV (16), Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3)(7), Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV) (4), among others.

i.The GSLV-F15 rocket is equipped with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage has successfully placed the NVS-02 satellite into the intended Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (**GTO**).

ii.NVS-02 is **2nd** out of the 5 second-generation Navigational Satellite (NVS) series (NVS-01/02/03/04/05), which are designed to augment Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC)base layer constellation with improved features for ensuring the continuity of services.

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO):

It is one of the six largest space agencies in the world.

Chairman- V Narayanan

Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established- 1969

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- It is also the 8th operational flight of GSLV with an indigenous cryogenic stage.

Points to Note:

i.ISRO launched its 1st mission on August 10, 1979, which was the experimental flight of Satellite Launch Vehicle-3 (**SLV-3 E10**) carrying the Rohini Technology Payload(RTP) from Sriharikota, AP.

ii.Since 1979, ISRO has conducted 99 launches with Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) carrying out 62 launches, followed by GSLV (16), Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3)(7), Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle (ASLV) (4), among others.

About GSLV-F15 Rocket:

i.The GSLV-F15 rocket is equipped with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage has successfully placed the NVS-02 satellite into the intended Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (**GTO**).

ii.It is a 3-stage launch vehicle, with lift-off mass of 420.7 tonne (t) and height of 50.9 meter (m).

iii.The GSLV-F15 payload fairing is a metallic version with a diameter of 3.4 m.

About NVS-02 satellite:

i.It is **2nd** out of the 5 second-generation Navigational Satellite (NVS) series (NVS-01/02/03/04/05), which are designed to augment Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) base layer constellation with improved features for ensuring the continuity of services.

- The NVS series of satellites uses L1 band Standard Positioning Service (SPS) signals to enhance adoption of NavIC services.
- It operates in the L1, L5, and S bands, essential for accurate navigation signals and improved positioning services.

ii.The satellite was designed, developed and integrated at Bengaluru (Karnataka)-based U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC).

iii.It weighs around **2,250 kilogram (kg)** and power handling capacity of nearly 3 kilo-Watt (kW) .

iv.It will be placed at 111.75 degree E, and will replace IRNSS-1E, the 5th navigation satellite of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS).

Note: In May 2023, ISRO launched GSLV-F12 mission, placed the 1st satellite of the 2nd-generation NVS, NVS-01 into GTO.

About NavIC System:

i.It is previously known as IRNSS, is an independent regional satellite system of India, designed to provide precise Position, Velocity and timing (PVT) service to users in India as well as in regions extending around **1,500 kilometer (km)** beyond Indian land mass.

- It will consist of 7 satellites placed in Geosynchronous and inclined geosynchronous orbits.

ii.NavIC will provide two types of services, namely, Standard Positioning Service (SPS) and Restricted Service (RS).

iii.SPS of NavIC will provide a position accuracy of better than 20 m and timing accuracy better than 40 nanoseconds (ns) over the service area.

About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO):

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Headquarters- Bengaluru, Karnataka

Established- 1969

South Africa's MeerKAT Telescope Discovers the "Inkathazo" Galaxy

In January 2025, a team of South African researchers and astrophysicists discovered a new giant radio galaxy (GRG), named 'Inkathazo,' using the **MeerKAT telescope** (formerly known as the Karoo Array Telescope (KAT)) in the Northern Cape province of South Africa.

- It spans 3.3 million light-years from end to end , **32 times** the size of our Milky Way galaxy, and is 1.44 billion light-years away from Earth.
- This discovery was published in the scientific journal *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* (MNRAS).

i.Inkathazo, meaning "trouble" in South Africa's isiXhosa and isiZulu languages, was named due to the challenges in understanding the physics behind this discovery.

ii.GRGs are enormous cosmic structures that emit jets of hot plasma, extending millions of light-years into space

iii.These glowing jets, visible at radio frequencies, are driven by supermassive black holes at the centers of galaxies.

NASA Discovers LID-568: A Supermassive Black Hole

In January 2025, **NASA**(National Aeronautics and Space Administration) of United States(US) government has unveiled a discovery "**LID-568**", a supermassive black hole that challenges current beliefs about how black holes form and grow.

- Supermassive black holes are one of the most common types in the universe. They are usually found at the center of most galaxies.

Key Highlights:

i.LID-568 was identified using the **James Webb Space Telescope (JWST)** and the **Chandra X-ray Observatory**.

ii.This black hole exists approximately **1.5 billion years after the Big Bang**, making it one of the earliest known black holes in the universe.

iii.The mass of LID-568 is estimated to be around 10 million times that of the Sun, positioning it as a low-mass supermassive black hole.

iv.LID-568 exhibits a remarkable feeding rate, consuming material at a pace **40 times greater** than the established Eddington limit, a phenomenon known as **super-Eddington accretion**. Super-Eddington accretion refers to a rare phenomenon where a black hole consumes material at a rate much higher than the Eddington limit.

v.The study, led by Hyewon Suh from the International Gemini Observatory/NSF NOIRLab, was published in Nature Astronomy in November 2024.

LID-568 Comparison with Other Supermassive Black Holes:

i.Sagittarius A: Located at the center of the Milky Way, Sagittarius A, has a mass of about 4.3 million solar masses. While LID-568 is heavier, both are categorized as low-mass supermassive black holes.

ii.M87: In contrast, M87, another well-known supermassive black hole, has a mass of around 6.5 billion solar masses, highlighting the significant difference in mass when compared to LID-568.

31st JANUARY 2025 Current Affairs

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Cabinet approvals on January 29 2025

On January 29 2025, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister (PM) **Narendra Modi** has approved the following proposals:

i.Launch of the 'National Critical Mineral Mission' (**NCMM**) to build a resilient 'Value Chain' for critical mineral resources essential for Green Technologies with a total cost of **Rs. 34,300** crore over a period of **7 years**.

ii.The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (**CCEA**) has approved the revision of the ethanol procurement price for Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) for the Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2024-25, starting from **1st November 2024** to **31st October 2025**.

- This revision, part of the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme of the Government of India (GoI), fixes the administered ex-mill price of ethanol from C Heavy Molasses (CHM) at **Rs. 57.97 per litre (l)**, up from Rs. 56.58 per litre.

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i.Launch of the 'National Critical Mineral Mission' (**NCMM**) to build a resilient 'Value Chain' for critical mineral resources essential for Green Technologies with a total cost of **Rs. 34,300** crore over a period of **7 years**.

ii.Revised Mechanism for Procurement of Ethanol by Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (**OMCs**) under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme – Price Adjustment for Ethanol Supply Year (**ESY**) **2024-25**.

Cabinet approves National Critical Mineral Mission(NCMM):

i.The Union Cabinet has approved the launch of the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) with an allocation of **Rs.16,300** crore (USD 1.88 billion), envisaging a total outlay of Rs.34,300 crore over a period of 7 years.

- NCMM aims to attract an investment of **Rs.18,000** crore (USD 2.08 billion) from Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and other entities.

ii.The announcement for launching the NCMM was made by the Union Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, Ministry of Finance (MoF) in the Union Budget for 2024-25.

iii.The mission will cover all stages of the mineral value chain, including exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing, and recycling.

- Additionally, financial incentives will be provided for critical mineral exploration.

iv.The mission will also support Indian PSUs and private companies in acquiring critical mineral assets abroad and strengthening trade ties with resource-rich countries.

v.This initiative aligns with the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programme to address challenges in critical minerals, essential for sectors like high-tech industries, clean energy, and defence.

Points to Note:

i.The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act or MMDR Act, 1957 was amended in 2023 to promote exploration and mining of these minerals.

- Following this, the Ministry of Mines (MoM) auctioned 24 blocks of strategic minerals.

ii.The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has undertaken 368 exploration projects for critical minerals over the past 3 years, with 195 projects currently active in the first quarter of Financial Year 2025-26 (FY 26).

- **24 Critical Minerals:** Beryl, Cadmium, Cobalt, Gallium, Glaucosite, Graphite, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Nickel, Niobium, Phosphate (without uranium), Platinum group of elements, Potash, Rare earth minerals (excluding Uranium and Thorium), Rhenium, Selenium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium and ores (ilmenite, rutile, leucosene), Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium and ores (including zircon).

iii.The Science and Technology – Promotion of Research and Innovation in Start-ups and MSMEs (S&T PRISM) programme was launched in 2023 to foster innovation and Research and Development (R&D) in this field.

Cabinet approves Revised Ethanol Procurement Prices

- i.**The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (**CCEA**) has approved the revision of the ethanol procurement price for Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) for the Ethanol Supply Year (**ESY**) **2024-25**, starting from 1st November 2024 to 31st October 2025.
- ii.**This revision, part of the Ethanol Blended Petrol (**EBP**) **Programme** of the Government of India (GoI), fixes the administered ex-mill price of ethanol from C Heavy Molasses (CHM) at **Rs. 57.97 per litre** (l), up from Rs. 56.58 per l.
- iii.**The revised pricing ensures continued stability for ethanol suppliers, reducing crude oil imports and promoting environmental sustainability.
- iv.**The new pricing will ensure Goods and Service Tax (GST) and transportation charges are separately payable to benefit sugarcane farmers.
- v.**As of ESY 2023-24, OMCs have achieved an average blending of 14.60%, up from 38 crore litres in 2013-14 to 707 crore litres.
 - The program has led to savings of approximately Rs. 1,13,007 crore in foreign exchange and a substitution of 193 lakh metric tonnes (MT)of crude oil.

Note:

- i.**The government has advanced its target for **20% ethanol blending** in petrol from **2030** to **ESY 2025-26**. OMCs plan to achieve 18% ethanol blending in ESY 2024-25.
- ii.**Investments are also being made to increase the capacity of ethanol distilleries to 1713 crore l per annum.
- iii.**The EBP programme was launched in 2003 by the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoP&NG) .

ASER Report 2024: Government Schools Outshine Private in Post-COVID Learning Recovery; Government Schools Enrolment Drops to 66.8%

In January 2025, the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) **Pratham Education Foundation** released the "[Annual Status of Education Report \(ASER\) 2024](#)", a nationwide household survey that covers the status of children's enrolment and learning outcomes in rural India annually. The report highlighted that enrolment in both government and private schools has returned to pre-COVID levels.

- However, the report noted government schools outshined private schools in Post-COVID learning recovery levels.
- The report showed that government schools, which saw a surge in enrolment for children aged 6-14 during the pandemic, are now returning to pre-pandemic levels, decreased from 72.9% (in 2022) **to 66.8% (in 2024)**. This trend can be seen in every state, except: Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K).

i.The household-based Survey ASER 2025 has almost covered 649,491 children aged 3-16, in 17,997 villages across 605 districts of 29 States/Union Territories (UTs) of India.

ii.The **drop-out rate** for children aged 15-16 has declined sharply from 13.1% (in 2018) to 7.5% (in 2022) but remained the same at **7.9%** (in 2024) at national level.

iii.The survey included a digital literacy section for the **1st time**, to assess the digital literacy awareness among children aged 14-16.

- The report found that almost 90% of both girls and boys among the age group of 14-16 have access to smartphones at home.

About Pratham Education Foundation:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Rukmini Banerji

Headquarters- Mumbai (Maharashtra), New Delhi (Delhi)

Established- 1995

In January 2025, the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) **Pratham Foundation** released the ["Annual Status of Education Report\(Rural\) 2024 \(ASER 2024\)"](#), a nationwide household survey that covers the status of children's enrolment and learning outcomes in rural India annually. The report highlighted that enrolment in both government and private schools has returned to pre-COVID levels.

- However, the report noted that the government schools outshined private schools in Post-COVID learning recovery levels.
- The report showed that government schools, which saw a surge in enrolment for children aged 6-14 during the pandemic, are now returning to pre-pandemic levels, decreased from 72.9% (in 2022) **to 66.8% (in 2024)**. This trend can be seen in every state, except: Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K).

About ASER Report 2024:

i. Since 2005, the survey was conducted by Pratham Education Foundation in collaboration with local organisations and institutions in each district.

- In 2016, ASER switched to an alternate-year model.

ii. The survey used the framework of the 2011 Census to randomly select 30 villages from each district, and 20 households from each village.

iii. The survey was conducted for children which has categorised them into 3 main age groups: Pre-Primary (age group 3-5), Elementary (age group 6-14), and Older Children (age group 15-16).

iv. The survey generated district, state, and national level estimates of children's enrollment status and their basic reading and arithmetic skills.

Key Findings of ASER 2024:

The household-based Survey ASER 2025 has covered almost covered 649,491 children aged 3-16, in 17,997 villages across 605 districts of 29 States/Union Territories (UTs) of India.

Pre-Primary (age group 3-5 years):

i.Enrolment in pre-primary institutions: The report observed that enrolment in some type of pre-primary institutions such as Anganwadi centre, government pre-primary class, among others, among children aged 3-5 years has improved steadily between 2018 and 2024.

- Enrolment in pre-primary institutions among 3-year olds has increased from 68.1% (in 2018) to 75.8% (in 2022) to 77.4% (in 2024). Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Telangana have achieved near-universal enrolment for this age group.

ii.Type of Pre-Primary Institution: Since 2018, over 50% of children aged 3 and 4 are enrolled in Anganwadi centres.

- Over 75% of children are enrolled in Anganwadi centres in both these age groups in states like: West Bengal (WB), Gujarat, and Karnataka.
- Nearly 33% (1/3rd) of all 5-year olds students attend a private school or pre-school in 2024 .Enrolment in these pre-schools decreased from 37.3% (in 2018) to 30.8% (in 2022) and again increased to 37.5% (in 2024).
- However, enrolment in government institutions has increased significantly in states like: Punjab (11.2% points) and J&K (7.6% points) since 2018.

iii.Age of Entry to Class I: The overall percentage of children who are 'underage' (age 5 or below) enrolled in Class I has decreased to 16.7%, the lowest level ever recorded.

Elementary (age group 6-14 years):

Enrolment Trends: The overall percentage of school enrolment for 6 to 14 year-olds increased to more than 95% for nearly 20 years.

- This proportion has remained almost the same, from 98.4% (in 2022) to 98.1% (in 2024).

Reading:

The data of the report indicates that reading levels have improved for children in government schools in all elementary grades since 2022.

i.ClassIII: The percentage of Class III students in government schools who can read a Class II textbook, decreased from 20.9% (in 2018) to 16.3% (in 2022) and then increased to 23.4% (in 2024). This indicates that 76.6% of Class III students were unable to read texts, which were provided in 19 different languages.

- The reading level in government schools of Uttar Pradesh (UP) has increased from 12.3% (in 2018) to 27.9% (in 2024).
- Apart from UP, states like: Haryana, Himachal Pradesh (HP), Uttarakhand, Maharashtra and Odisha recorded a 10% increase in reading levels between 2022 and 2024.

ii.Class V: The percentage of Class V students in government schools who can read a Class II textbook increased from 38.5% (in 2022) to **44.8% (in 2024)**.

- While, reading levels for Class V children in private schools, which declined from 65.1% (in 2018) to 56.8% (in 2022) and increased to 59.3% (in 2024).
- Mizoram (64.9%) had the highest percentage of Class V children in government schools able to read Class II text-books, followed by HP (64.8%).

iii.Class VIII: The percentage of Class VIII students in government schools who can read a Class VIII textbook increased from 66.2% (in 2022) to 67.5% (in 2024). The performance of private school students remained the same between 2022 and 2024.

- Government schools in states like: Gujarat, UP, and Sikkim witnessed notable improvements in reading levels for Class VIII students.

Arithmetic:

The report showed that the basic arithmetic level of children at national-level has improved significantly in both government and private schools, reaching the highest level in over a decade.

i.Class III: The overall percentage of students in Class III who are able to at least do a numerical subtraction problem, decreased from 28.2% (in 2018) to 25.9% (in 2022) and then increased to 33.7% (in 2024).

ii.Class V: The overall percentage of students in Class V who are able to at least do a numerical division problem increased from 25.6% (in 2022) to 30.7% (in 2024). This increase is attributed mainly by the government schools.

iii.Class VIII: The performance of Class VIII students in basic arithmetic has increased marginally from 44.7% (in 2022) to 45.8% (in 2024).

Drop- out Rate :

The **drop-out rate** for children aged 15-16 has declined sharply from 13.1% (in 2018) to 7.5% (in 2022) but remained the same at **7.9%** (in 2024) at national level.

- The survey showed that the drop-out rate for girls, increased marginally from 7.9% (in 2022) to 8.1% (in 2024).
- However, some states witnessed decline in the percentage of drop-out for girls: Madhya Pradesh (MP) (16.1%), Uttar Pradesh (UP) (15%), Rajasthan (12.7%), among others.

Digital Literacy:

The survey included a **digital literacy section for the 1st time**, to assess the digital literacy awareness among children aged 14-16.

i.Access: The report found that almost 90% of both girls and boys among the age group of 14-16 have access to smartphones at home.

- The proportion of those who have access to smartphones and those who can use smartphones is lower for states like: MP, Jharkhand and Bihar compared to other states.

ii.Ownership: The report highlighted that personal ownership of smartphone among 14-16 year-olds has increased from 19% (in 2022) to 31% (in 2024).

- 27% of 14-year-olds and 37.8% of 16-year-olds reported having their own phone.
- Among 14-16 years-olds, 36.2% of boys and 26.9% of girls reported having their own smartphone.

iii.Use: 82.2% of the children aged 14-16 reported knowing how to use a smartphone (85% of boys as compared to 79.4% of girls).

- Of these, 57% reported using it for an educational activity and 76% for the social media activity during the same period.

iv.Digital Safety: 62% of children aged 14-16 knew how to block or report a profile and 55% knew how to make a profile private.

v.Digi Skills: The report showed that 70.2% boys and 62.2% girls were able to bring a smartphone to do the digital tasks.

- The report noted that boys outperform girls across most states in digital skills, except in states like: Kerala and Karnataka, where girls match or outperform boys.

School Observations:

i. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) activities: More than **80%** of schools received a directions from the government to implement FLN activities with Class I-II/III both in the last as well as the current academic year.

ii. Student and Teacher Attendance: The average attendance of teachers increased from 85.1% (in 2018) to **87.5% (in 2024)**, and the average attendance of students increased from 72.4% (in 2018) to **75.9% (in 2024)**.

iii. Small Schools and Multigrade Classrooms: The proportion of government primary schools with less than 60 students enrolled, increased from 44% (in 2022) to 52.1% (in 2024).

- Over 80% of primary schools in states like: J&K, Uttarakhand, Nagaland and Karnataka, are small schools.

iv. School Facilities: As per the report, only 72% schools have usable girls' toilets, increase from 66.4% (in 2018), while 77.7% schools have drinking water facilities.

- Sports facilities show little improvement; with just **66.2%** of schools having playgrounds in 2024, a slight decrease from 66.5% (in 2018).

About Pratham Education Foundation:

Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)- Rukmini Banerji

Headquarters- Mumbai (Maharashtra), New Delhi (Delhi)

Established- 1995

Union Minister Giriraj Singh Inaugurates 'Handloom Conclave – Manthan' in New Delhi; Launched e-pehchaan portal

On January 29 2025, Union Minister **Giriraj Singh**, Ministry of Textiles (MoT), inaugurated the '**Handloom Conclave – Manthan**' at the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi, Delhi.

- The conclave aligned with Prime Minister (PM) of India, Narendra Modi's **5F vision** :“Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign”, emphasizing a holistic approach to boosting the handloom industry.
- The event also explored ways to make the sector a driving force in achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Key Highlights:

i.The event featured **three** specialized sessions aimed at strengthening the handloom sector. The sessions focused on:

- **Encouraging Start-ups in Handloom:** Discussed ways to support new businesses in the industry.
- **Effective Marketing for Handloom Products:** Focused on expanding market reach and improving sales strategies.
- **Inspiring Youth to Join Handloom Weaving:** Explored methods to attract and retain young artisans in the sector.

ii.The **key outcomes** of the technical sessions include: integrating handloom weaving into formal education, focusing on niche products to stand out in the market, and promoting sustainable employment opportunities in the handloom sector.

iii.He emphasized the need to promote sustainable, eco-friendly handloom products, especially with the online market projected to reach **USD 325 billion** by 2030.

Launch of Digital Initiatives:

During the event, Union Minister Giriraj Singh launched the **Handloom Weavers Electronic (e)-Pehchaan portal** and an **online module for Handloom Awards**, marking a significant step in digitizing the sector.

- The MoT will **introduce an award** for corporates, producer companies, and start-ups that create sustainable job opportunities for weavers, ensuring they have work for at least 300 days a year.
- This initiative **aims** to provide social security and fair wages to handloom workers.

About Ministry of Textiles (MoT):

Union Minister– Giriraj Singh (Constituency -Begusarai , Bihar)

Minister of State (**MoS**)– Pabitra Margherita (Rajya Sabha – Assam)

100 Odisha Villages to Receive Direct Funds for Forest Protection under CFR Plans Approved by MoTA

In January 2025, the Project Appraisal Committee (**PAC**) under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has approved Community Forest Resource (**CFR**) plans for **100** villages in phase-I under the Forest Right (FRA) Act, 2006. This number is less than Odisha government proposal to implement it in 400 villages of the state.

- With this approval, as many as 100 villages of Odisha will receive funds directly in the bank accounts of Gram Sabhas instead of Gram Panchayats for the first time to carry out forest protection, management and convergence works in respective community lands.

Key Points:

- i.**The state government will receive **Rs 16 crore** for development and execution of CFR management plans of 100 villages.
 - ii.**The State will prioritise these CFR plans based on Minor Forest Produce (MFP) available, preparedness of the plans, community and gram sabha participation and set up of Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
 - iii.****Gram Sabhas** of villages are entrusted with responsibility to carry out tree plantation and prepare need-based development plan.
 - iv.**Each village will receive **Rs 15 lakh per annum**, which will be directly deposited into the bank account of the respective gram sabha. Also, technical agencies will receive Rs 1 lakh for developing management plans.
 - v.**CFR management plan proposed in various districts of state: Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Koraput, Malkangiri, Dhenkanal, and Bargarh.
- Note:** As per MoTA, **Maharashtra** topped among states in recognizing Community Forest Resource Rights (CFRR), with 8,661 villages granted titles as of November 2024, followed by Chhattisgarh (with 4,328 titles), Odisha (with 3,659 titles).

BANKING & FINANCE

RBI Approved Establishment of NUCFDC to boost UCBs

The Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) has approved the establishment of National Urban Co-operative Finance and Development Cooperation (**NUCFDC**) as an Umbrella Organisation (UO) to boost Urban Co-operative Bodies (**UCBs**) across India. It has also approved NUCFDC to function as a Non-Banking Finance Company (**NBFC**).

- In January 2025, Union Minister **Amit Shah**, the Ministry of Cooperation inaugurated the corporate office of the NUCFDC during the inaugural function of International Year of Cooperatives 2025 held in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Key Functions of NUCFDC:

RBI has mandated NUCFDC to provide two types of services: Fund-based support and Non-fund based support to UCBs which are its shareholder-members.

i.Fund-based support: NUCFDC is required to provide capital support to UCBs as per regulations and guidelines & terms and conditions.

- It is also required to offer secured credit lines on merits to UCBs to handle temporary liquidity mismatches.
- It will help in re-financing UCBs against their loans.
- It will manage deposits and borrowings from UCBs and Financial Institutions (FIs).
- Investments

ii.Non-Fund based services: NUCFDC will support the rollout of a shared Information Technology (IT) platform offering a comprehensive suite of services.

- It will provide treasury management, payment and settlement services, and other operational solutions to enhance the capabilities of UCBs.
- It will also provide training, consultancy and Human Resource (HR) support to ensure UCBs are well-equipped to adapt evolving regulatory and market demands.

Key Points:

i.In February 2024, NUCFDC obtained registration from RBI after raising paid up capital of Rs 117.95 crore.

ii.NUCFDC requires the RBI approval to act as Self-Regulatory Organisation (SRO) for UCBs, with functions prescribed by the RBI.

- However, NUCFDC will receive this approval only if it attains the paid up capital of Rs 300 crore within 1 year from the date of registration by RBI i.e. up to 7th February, 2025.

About National Urban Co-operative Finance and Development Cooperation**(NUCFDC):**

Chairman- Jyotindra M. Mehta

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Prabhat Chaturvedi

Headquarters- Mumbai, Maharashtra

RBI Takes Over AIHFPL Board Amid Governance and Payment Defaults

In January 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (**RBI**) replaced the board of directors of New Delhi (Delhi) based Aviom India Housing Finance Private Limited (**AIHFPL**) over governance issues and payment defaults after audits revealed fraud and governance lapses.

- This action was taken under Section 45-IE(1) of the RBI Act, 1934, following the recommendation of the National Housing Bank (NHB).

i.The RBI appointed **Ram Kumar**, former Chief General Manager (CGM) of Punjab National Bank (PNB), as the administrator of AIHFPL under Section 45-IE(2) of the RBI Act, 1934.

ii.RBI to initiate the resolution process of the company under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy (Insolvency and Liquidation Proceedings of Financial Service Providers and Application to Adjudicating Authority) Rules, 2019 (FSP Rules, 2019).

About Aviom India Housing Finance Private Limited (AIHFPL):

Managing Director (**MD**) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**) – Kaajal Aijaz Ilmi

Headquarters – New Delhi, Delhi

Founded – 2016

BHIM Partners with Fintech Yatra to Promote Financial Inclusion, Digital Literacy

In January 2025, Bharat Interface Money (**BHIM**), India's flagship digital payments application (app) powered by Mumbai (Maharashtra)-based NPCI BHIM Services Limited(**NBSL**), a subsidiary of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), has partnered with the **Fintech Yatra 2025** as a Principal Partner.

- This strategic collaboration aims to accelerate the adoption of digital payments, enhance financial inclusion, and promote digital literacy across the country.

i.The Fintech Yatra is a 10,000 kilometer (km) long epic road journey, which aimed to identify, understand, and boost players in financial services across India. It is a platform that connects startups, Financial Institutions (FIs), and investors while simultaneously promoting digital independence.

ii.As part of this collaboration, over 200 individuals from select Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) will be trained under a train-the-trainer model, empowering them to raise awareness about digital payments.

SEBI Launches 'iSPOT Portal' for Reporting Technical Issues

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Securities and Exchange Board of India (**SEBI**) launched a web-based portal named the 'Integrated SEBI Portal for Technical Glitches (**iSPOT**)' for submission of preliminary and final Root Cause Analysis (RCA) reports of technical glitches by stock exchanges and other Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs).

- The portal will be operational from **3rd February, 2025**. It is integrated with SEBI's Intermediary (SI) portal, allowing MIIs to access it using their existing login credentials.
- It aimed to simplify the reporting process of technical glitches across MIIs and establish a centralized repository for all such incidents.

i.With the introduction of iSPOT, MIIs will now share preliminary and RCA reports of technical glitches with SEBI through this

portal, ensuring better data quality, traceability, and improved compliance monitoring.

- Previously, MIIs, including stock exchanges, clearing corporations, and depositories, were required to report technical glitches and submit RCA reports to SEBI via a dedicated electronic mail Identification (email ID).

iii.iSPOT will send automated reminders to MIIs for RCA submissions and generate system-driven reports for regulatory monitoring.

HDFC Securities Partners with KFin Technologies to Enhance NPS Access

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based **HDFC Securities** Limited, a subsidiary of HDFC Bank Limited, entered into a strategic partnership with Hyderabad (Telangana) based **KFin Technologies** Limited to improve accessibility and adoption of the National Pension System (**NPS**).

- The partnership aims to simplify NPS management by offering features like flexible transaction downloads and real-time Short Message Service (SMS) notifications.
- The collaboration brings together HDFC Securities' network of more than 3.5 lakh subscribers and 2,700 corporate clients with KFin's Central Recordkeeping Agency (CRA) platform.

i. CRAs are crucial to the NPS ecosystem as they manage subscriber records, ensure transparency, and facilitate smooth account operations.

ii. CRA platform includes advanced security features such as dual-factor authentication, utilizing passwords, and one-time passwords (OTPs).

iii. Subscribers can also use dedicated portals, WhatsApp services, and a missed-call facility to easily monitor investments and make changes.

Note: In 2024, the Government of India (GoI) has increased tax benefits under corporate NPS from 10% to **14%** of basic income.

ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Tata Steel Limited, India's 1st company to Develop Hydrogen Transport Pipes

On January 29 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based Tata Steel Limited(TSL), formerly known as Tata Iron and Steel Company Limited (TISCO), became **India's 1st Steel company** to demonstrate the capability to develop steel pipes for hydrogen(H₂) transportation, marking a significant step toward supporting India's National Hydrogen Mission (**NHM**).

- The company successfully developed hydrogen-compliant **API X65 ERW** steel pipes, which are crucial for the transport of **100%** pure gaseous hydrogen under high pressure (100 bar).

Note: API X65 ERW steel, is also called ISO 3183 L450 pipe, manufactured according to the American Petroleum Institute (API) 5L standard, specifically designated as "Grade X65" and produced using the Electric Resistance Welding (ERW) process.

Development and Testing Process:

- i.The pipes were processed at Tata Steel's **Khopoli plant**, Mumbai (Maharashtra) utilizing steel and was manufactured at Tata Steel's **Kalinganagar plant**, Odisha.
- ii.The technology development, including the design and manufacture of **hot-rolled steel** and pipe production, was carried out entirely in-house by TSL.
- iii.**Testing & Certification:** The hydrogen qualification tests for the pipes were conducted by RINA Consulting – Centro Sviluppo Materiali (**CSM**) S.p.A., **Italy**, a leading agency for hydrogen-related testing.
- iv.The API X65 ERW pipes passed all critical tests required for hydrogen transportation, confirming their suitability for high-pressure hydrogen transport.

Points to Note:

- i.This development supports India's NHM, which aims to produce **5 million metric tonnes (MMT)** of green hydrogen annually by **2030**, with the potential to increase to 10 MMT for export.
- ii.The demand for hydrogen-compliant steel pipes will begin in **2026-27**, with an estimated total requirement of 350 kiloton (KT) over the next 5-7 years.

About Tata Steel Limited(TSL):

In 2024, TSL became the 1st Indian steel company to produce **hot-rolled steel** for the transportation of gaseous hydrogen.

Managing Director (MD) & Chief Executive Officer (**CEO**)– Thachath Viswanath Narendran

Headquarters– Mumbai, Maharashtra

Established– 1907

RDCL Receives RBI Approval to Transform India's Mortgage-Backed Securitisation Market

In January 2025, Mumbai (Maharashtra) based RMBS(Residential Mortgage-Backed Securitisation) Development Company Limited (**RDCL**) received its Certificate of Registration (**CoR**) from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) marking a major milestone for India's housing finance sector.

- The paid-up Capital of RSDL is **Rs.500 crore** and is expected to commence operations in **March 2025**.
- RDCL is designed to create new opportunities for long-term institutional investors, including Insurance Companies, Pension Funds (PFs), and Provident Funds (PFs).

About RDCL:

i.The National Housing Bank (**NHB**), a statutory body under the Government of India (GoI), has set up RDCL as the single largest shareholder.

ii.RDCL is supported by a diverse group of investors, including Banks, Housing Finance Companies (HFCs), Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), and Insurance Companies.

iii.RDCL aims to drive innovation in securitisation, boost investor confidence, support housing finance policies, and collaborate with key stakeholders.

Key Objectives :

i.Enhancing Housing Finance Liquidity: RDCL will invest in RMBS issuances to support liquidity in the housing finance sector.

ii.Providing Risk Management Solutions: By offering 2nd-loss credit enhancements, RDCL will help manage risks in the RMBS market.

iii.Addressing Liquidity Challenges: RDCL will offer liquidity solutions to Primary Lending Institutions (PLIs), helping them overcome short-term funding challenges.

iv.Standardizing Practices: RDCL will focus on standardizing processes and documentation to ensure transparency and foster trust among stakeholders.

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Significance of RMBS Market Development:

i.The RMBS market plays a crucial role in meeting the growing demand for housing finance in India by broadening funding sources, complementing traditional funding methods, providing liquidity to PLIs, and creating opportunities for investment in the secondary market.

ii.Between March 2019 and March 2024, the outstanding individual housing loans in India grew from **Rs 17.95 Lakh Crore** to **Rs. 33.19 Lakh** Crore, achieving a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 13.1%.

AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

Winners of the 76th Republic Day Parade 2025: Awards and Recognitions

Winners were announced in different categories for the participants of the 76th Republic Day Parade in 2025, with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (**MoTA**) winning the **Best Tableau award** in the Ministries/Departments category. The award was given for **their vibrant display** celebrating the "Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh" and the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda.

- The awards were decided through **two methods**: one by a panel of judges and the other through an online public vote held on the MyGov platform.
- This year, 31 tableaux from 16 states and Union Territories (UTs) and 10 ministries and departments of the Central Government (CG) participated in R-day Parade 2025 at Karvyapath, New Delhi, Delhi.

Highlights:

i.The Jammu & Kashmir (**J&K**) **Rifles Contingent** was awarded the Best Marching Contingent among Services Category by the panel of judges.

ii.Uttar Pradesh (**UP**) won the **first prize** in the **Best Tableaux category** by the panel of judges for its depiction of Mahakumbh 2025 and Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas.

Guinness World Record for Largest Indian Folk Dance Performance at Republic Day 2025

The Guinness World Records **recognized the cultural performance titled Jayati Jai Mamah Bharatam** for setting the record for "**The Largest Indian Folk Variety Dance.**" The performance was curated by the Ministry of Culture, along with Sangeet Natak Akademi.

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Judging Panels:

Three separate panels of judges were formed to evaluate the performances of:

- i. Marching contingents from the three services
- ii. Marching contingents from the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) or other auxiliary forces,
- iii. Tableaux displayed by different States, union territories (UTs), and central government departments.

Online Poll:

An online poll was held on the **MyGov web page** from January 26 to January 28, 2025. Registered citizens can vote for their favorite Marching Contingents and Tableaux in the 'Popular Choice' category.

Highlights:

- i. The Jammu & Kashmir (**J&K**) **Rifles Contingent** was awarded the Best Marching Contingent among Services Category by the panel of judges.
- ii. Uttar Pradesh (**UP**) won the **first prize** in the **Best Tableaux category** by the panel of judges for its depiction of Mahakumbh 2025 and Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas.
- iii. The Ministry of Women & Child Development (**MoWCD**) received the **People's Choice Award** for Best Tableau from the Central Ministries/Departments Category.

Results for the best Marching Contingents & Tableaux for the Republic Day Parade 2025 (By Panel of Judges)

Category	Winner
Best Tableau from Central Ministries/Departments	Ministry of Tribal Affairs, (Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh)
Best Three Tableaux among States/(UTs)	First-Uttar Pradesh (UP) – (Mahakumbh 2025, Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas) Second-Tripura (Eternal Reverence: The Worship of 14 Deities in Tripura – Kharchi Puja) Third-Andhra Pradesh,AP (Etikoppaka Bommalu – Eco-Friendly Wooden Toys)
Best Marching Contingent among Services	Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) Rifles Contingent
Best Marching Contingent among CAPFs/Other Auxiliary Forces	Delhi Police Marching Contingent
Special Prize	Central Public Works Department(CPWD) (Highlighting Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s vision)
Special Momentum	Jayati Jai Mamah Bharatam Dance Group

Results for the best Marching Contingents & Tableaux for the Republic Day 2025 Parade (ByOnline Poll on MyGov):

Category	Winner
Best Tableau from Central Ministries/Departments	Ministry of Women & Child Development, MoWCD (The Multifaceted Journey of Women and Children)
Best Tableau among States/UTs	First -Gujarat(Swarnim Bharat: Virasat Aur Vikas) Second- Uttar Pradesh (Mahakumbh 2025 – Swarnim Bharat: Virasat Aur Vikas) Third- Uttarakhand (Cultural Heritage and Adventure Sports)
Best Marching Contingent among Services	Signals Contingent
Best Marching Contingent among CAPFs/Other Auxiliary Forces	CRPF Marching Contingent

Beating Retreat ceremony:

The grand finale of 76th Republic Day celebrations took place on 29 January, 2025 with the Beating Retreat ceremony at Vijay Chowk, New Delhi.

- Commander (Cmdr) Manoj Sebastian led the massed bands.The ceremony concluded with the patriotic song.

Guinness World Record for Largest Indian Folk Dance Performance at Republic Day 2025

The Guinness World Records **recognized the cultural performance titled Jayati Jai Mamah Bharatam** for setting the record for **“The Largest Indian Folk Variety Dance.”** The performance was curated by the Ministry of Culture, along with Sangeet Natak Akademi.

- This recognition was announced by Guinness officials during a special ceremony at the Pusa Institute in New Delhi.

IBA Technology Awards 2024: CUB Wins 7 Awards for 2nd Consecutive Year

In January 2025, the Indian Banks' Association (**IBA**) presented the technology awards in **seven categories** to honor top technology providers in the banking industry at the **20th** Annual Banking Technology Conference, Expo, & Citations, 2024 held in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- The conference was organized by Indian Banks Association (IBA) and awards presented by RBI Deputy Governor T. Rabi Sankar.

i.The awards are presented across 7 categories of Banks in 7 citation categories. Each award was presented to various Banks under three status :Winner, Runner-Up and Special mention.
ii.City Union Bank Limited(**CUB**) and Bank of Maharashtra (**BoM**) win awards in all seven categories, while Karnataka Bank Limited(**KBL**) secures wins in six categories.

About Indian Banks Association (IBA):

Chairman – Matam Venkata Rao

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Founded – 1946

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IBA Technology Awards 2024:

The awards are presented across 7 categories of Banks in 7 citation categories. Each award was presented to various Banks under three status :Winner, Runner-Up and Special mention.

i.Best Digital Sales, Payments & Engagement

ii.Best Information Technology (IT) Risk Management

iii.Best Fintech & Digital Payment Index (DPI) Adoption

iv.Best Financial Inclusion (FI)

v.Best Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning (ML) Adoption

vi.Best Technology Talent & Organization and

vii.Best Technology Bank

Highlights:

i.CUB received awards in all 7 categories for the **second consecutive year**.

- In the winner category, CUB won awards in Best Digital Sales, Payments & Engagement, Best IT Risk Management, Best Fintech & DPI Adoption and Best FI.
- In the winner category, BoM won awards in Best Digital Sales, Payments & Engagement, Best IT Risk Management and Best Fintech & DPI Adoption.

ii.HDFC Bank Limited won the award for Best Digital Sales, Payments & Engagement.

iii.State Bank of India (SBI) won the Best Fintech & DPI Adoption and Best FI awards.

iv.Bank of Baroda (BOB) won the Best AI & ML Adoption and Best IT Risk Management awards.

v.Union Bank of India (UBI) won the Best Technology Talent & Organization and Best Technology Bank awards.

vi.Central Bank of India (CBI) won the Best Technology Bank award.

vii.Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) won the Best Technology Talent & Organization award.

viii.ESAF Small Finance Bank Limited won the Best FI awards

[Click here for the full list of IBA 2024 award winners.](#)

About IBA awards:

The IBA awards are designed to honor top technology providers in the banking industry, fostering competition and encouraging the showcase of innovative products, purposeful initiatives, and substantial value through best practices in customer service.

Recent Related News:

In December 2024, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Central Bank of Sri Lanka has imposed monetary penalty of Rs 5.85 Lakhs (2 million Sri Lankan rupees(LKR)) on Chennai (Tamil Nadu (TN))- based Public Sector Bank (PSB), Indian Bank Limited for not complying with the provisions of Sri Lanka's Financial Transactions Reporting Act No.6 of 2006 (FTRA). At present, Indian Bank has its two branches in Sri Lanka i.e. in Jaffna and Colombo.

About Indian Banks Association (IBA):

Chairman – Matam Venkata Rao

Headquarters – Mumbai, Maharashtra

Founded – 1946

SPORTS

Odisha Warriors win 1st ever Inaugural Women's Hockey India League Title 2025

In January 2025, Odisha Warriors won the **1st ever** 'Inaugural Women's Hockey India League Title 2025' by defeating JSW ((Jindal South West) Soorma Hockey Club of Punjab and Haryana.

- The 'Odisha Warriors' secured 2-1 in the final tournament held at Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda AstroTurf Hockey Stadium in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

i.Rutuja Dadaso Pisal was the Star player of the show for the 'Odisha Warriors' as she scored both the goals for her side in the 20th and 56th minute.

ii.She gave the 'Odisha Warriors' the lead in the 2nd quarter but Penny Squibb (28') equalised for JSW Soorma Hockey Club.

iii.Other Winners:

- Best Goalkeeper – Savita Punia (JSW Soorma Hockey Club)
- Player of the Tournament – Jyoti Rumavat (JSW Soorma Hockey Club)
- Top Scorers of the Tournament – Yibbi Jansen (Odisha Warriors) and Charlotte Englebert (JSW Soorma Hockey Club)

Indian Athlete Jyothi Yarraji Sets National Record in 60m Hurdles

In January 2025, Jyothi Yarraji, Indian track and field athlete from Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh (AP) clinched the Gold medal in the women's 60 meter(m) hurdles held at the Elite Indoor Meeting in Nantes, France.

- Jyothi Yarraji, broke her own National Record twice in one day and clocked **8.07 seconds** in the heats and **8.04 seconds** in the final, setting a new National Record for India.

i.Her previous record was **8.12 seconds**, set at the 2024 Asian Indoor Championships in Tehran (Iran) where she also won Gold medal in the 60m hurdle.

ii.On January 17, 2025, she was awarded the '**Arjuna Award 2024**' for her performance in the 100 m hurdles in athletics at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi (Delhi).

Note:In the men's 60m hurdles, **Tejas Shirse** secured the Bronze Medal with a time of 7.68 seconds and set a national record in Luxembourg with a time of 7.65 seconds.

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day 2025- January 30

The World Health Organization (WHO's) World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day(WNTDD) is observed annually on **January 30** across the globe to raise awareness of the devastating impact of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) on the most vulnerable populations around the world.

- The theme of World NTDs Day 2025:“**Unite. Act. Eliminate**” emphasizes the collective commitment needed to end these diseases.

Background:

i.WNTDD was 1st announced by the Crown Prince Court of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the 2019 Reaching the Last Mile Forum.

- The inaugural observance was observed on **January 30 2020**.

ii.On May 31 2021, the 74th World Health Assembly (WHA) designated January 30th as WNTDD through decision WHA74(18), a proposal supported by the UAE, Oman, Brazil, and other member states.

Note:As of December 2024, **54 countries** had successfully eliminated at least one NTD worldwide.

About World Health Organization (WHO):

Director-General (**DG**)-Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland

Established- April 7, 1948

The World Health Organization's (WHO) World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day (**WNTDD**) is observed annually on **January 30** across the globe to raise awareness of the devastating impact of NTDs on the most vulnerable populations around the world.

Theme:

i.The theme of WNTDD 2025:“**Unite. Act. Eliminate**” emphasizes the collective commitment needed to end these diseases.

ii.The theme urges leaders and communities to unite and make bold, sustainable investments to eliminate NTDs and free an estimated **1.5 billion** people in the most vulnerable communities from the cycle of disease and poverty.

Background:

i. WNTDD was 1st announced by the Crown Prince Court of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the 2019 Reaching the Last Mile Forum held in Abu Dhabi.

- The inaugural observance was observed on **January 30 2020**.

ii. On May 31, 2021, the 74th World Health Assembly (WHA) designated January 30 as WNTDD through decision **WHA74(18)**, a proposal supported by the UAE, Oman, Brazil, and other member states.

iii. This day is now recognized as one of the 11 Global Health Days and 2 Global Health Weeks by the WHO.

Note: As of December 2024, **54 countries** had successfully eliminated at least one NTD worldwide.

Why January 30 ?

i. On 30th January 2012, WNTDD marked the release of the **1st NTD Roadmap** (2012-2020) alongside the adoption of the London Declaration on NTDs, which highlighted the global impact of neglected tropical diseases.

ii. The WHO launched the new NTD road map (2021-2030) on January 28, 2021.

iii. The WHO's NTD roadmap (2021-2030) and the Kigali Declaration 2022 on NTD set ambitious targets for control and elimination.

- The primary goal of WHO is to eliminate at least one NTD in 100 countries by **2030**.

About Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs):

- i.**NTDs are a group of treatable and preventable conditions caused by parasites, bacteria, viruses, and fungi, impacting over **1 billion** people worldwide.
- ii.**These diseases comprise around **20 conditions** and are most common in tropical and subtropical areas, where poor living conditions, limited access to sanitation, clean water, and healthcare exacerbate their spread.
- iii.**Affecting the world's most impoverished populations, NTDs contribute to 1000 of preventable deaths each year

Global Challenges:

- i.**NTDs affect millions globally, with burdens in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean and South-East Asia regions.
- ii.**Interventions for NTDs benefit from one of the largest global medicine donation programs, with 12 manufacturers providing donations of 20 different medicines to support NTD efforts.
 - An estimated **75 million** people require interventions against NTDs in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.
- iii.**In South-East Asia, 16 NTDs remain endemic, with **833 million** people still needing interventions, in each of the 11 Member States.
- iv.**Between 2010 and 2022, the number of people requiring interventions against NTDs in the Region decreased by **54%**.
- v.**Between 2011 and 2024, nearly 30 billion tablets and vials were delivered to countries, with 1.8 billion tablets and vials donated and delivered for treatments in 2024 alone.
- vi.**In 2024, 7 countries achieved the elimination of an NTD and in **2023**, over **860 million** people received treatment for NTDs through mass drug administration and individual disease management efforts.
 - 10 countries in the Region had eliminated at least one NTD by 2024.

NTDs Elimination Strategies:

The Regional Strategic Framework for the elimination of NTDs in the South-East Asia Region (2024–2030) outlines a clear and comprehensive roadmap to tackle these diseases through 3 strategic pillars. It includes:

i. Strengthening Country ownership, Leadership and Stewardship,

ii. Accelerating Programmatic Actions, and

iii. Intensifying Integrated and Cross-Cutting Approaches.

About World Health Organization (WHO):

Director-General **(DG)**-Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Headquarters- Geneva, Switzerland

Established- April 7, 1948

Shaheed Divas or Martyrs' Day 2024 – January 30

Martyrs' Day, also known as **Sarvodaya Day or Shaheed Diwas**, is annually observed across India on January 30 to honour those who sacrificed their lives for the nation.

- This day also marks the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the 'Father of the Nation'. It is observed on January 30 in memory of Mahatma Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1948.
- 30th January 2025 marks the 77th death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- Additionally, Martyrs' Day is observed on March 23 to remember freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Shivaram Rajguru, and Sukhdev Thapar, who were hanged by the British.

Background:-

- Martyrs' Day was officially declared in 1949, a year after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination on January 30, 1948, to honour his memory and the sacrifices of other freedom fighters.
- Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated on 30th January 1948 by Nathuram Godse, in Birla House, New Delhi, Delhi.

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About Mahatma Gandhi:

- i. Mahatma Gandhi was born as "Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi" on 2nd October 1869 in Porbandar, Gujarat.
- ii. He was a lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist and politician who played a major role in India's freedom struggle.
- iii. Gandhi played a pivotal role in movements like the Khilafat Movement, Quit India Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement, and Champaran Satyagraha.

Books:

- i. "**The Story of My Experiments with Truth**" the autobiography of Gandhi, covers his life through to 1921. It was originally written in Gujarati and was translated into English by **Mahadev Desai**.
- ii. His other noted works include, 'Gokhale: My Political Guru'; 'The Law and the Lawyers', and 'Satyagraha in South Africa'.
- iii. He translated John Ruskin's "Unto This Last" in Gujarati as "Sarvodaya".

Honours:

- i. In 1930, he was named TIME Magazine's "**Man of the Year**" (Now awarded as 'Person of the Year'). To date, he remains the only Indian to be honoured with the title.
- ii. On the occasion of his 125th birth anniversary (2nd October 1995), the Government of India launched the International Gandhi Peace Prize as a tribute to Gandhi.

Other Martyrs' Day observed in India:

- **23rd March** – to commemorate the death anniversary of Bhagat Singh, Shivaram Rajguru, and Sukhdev Thapar.
- **19th May** – observed as Bhasha Shahid Divas (Language Martyrs' Day), to remember the martyrdom of 11 people who were killed during the Bengali Language Movement.
- **19th November** – to commemorate the birth anniversary of Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Maratha queen who ruled the Princely state of Jhansi.