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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

First Auction for Green Ammonia by SECI

In the News: In a breakthrough under India's **National Green Hydrogen Mission**, the **Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI)** conducted the **first-ever auction** for **green ammonia** procurement on **August 6, 2025**, under the **SIGHT Scheme (Mode-2A)**. This auction secured a **record-low price** discovery of **₹55.75 per kg**. The contract — 75,000 tonnes per annum of green ammonia — was awarded for supply to **Paradeep Phosphates Limited** in Odisha. It marks the first of **13 auctions** planned under a tender for a total capacity of **7.24 lakh MT per year**.

Key Points:

- **Record-Low Pricing:** The ₹55.75/kg (~USD 641/MT) rate is significantly lower than the ₹100.28/kg (~USD 1,153/MT) discovered in the H2Global auction in 2024, and competitive relative to grey ammonia at USD 515/MT (March 2025).
- **Strategic Volume & Scope:** The auction covers **75,000 metric tonnes per annum**, with 12 more auctions to follow, collectively targeting **7.24 lakh MT/year**.
- **Auction Mechanism & Institutional Roles:** SECI acted as the procuring intermediary, under the guidance of the **Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE)**, with support from the **Department of Fertilizers** and the offtakers. The competitive bidding showcased investor confidence, and robust payment security provisions were deployed to enable scaling.

Ancient Buddhist Site, Sarnath — India Nominates for UNESCO World Heritage Status

In the News: India has officially submitted **Sarnath**, the **ancient Buddhist pilgrimage site near Varanasi**, as its exclusive nomination for the **2025–26 UNESCO World Heritage cycle**, moving the site from India's **Tentative List (since 1998)** toward potential inscription. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), along with the Ministry of Culture, spearheaded the nomination process.

Key Points:

- **Nomination Highlights:** The dossier, titled "**Ancient Buddhist Site, Sarnath**", has now been formally submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The full evaluation process—spanning technical review, expert advice, and Committee approval—takes around **1.5 years**.
- **Heritage Significance:** Sarnath is globally revered as the place where **Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermon**, making it one of Buddhism's four most sacred pilgrimage destinations. The site boasts monuments spanning the **3rd century BCE to the 12th century CE**, including the **Dhamek Stupa**, **Chaukhandi Stupa**, **Ashokan Pillar**, **Mulagandha Kuti Vihara**, and the **Sarnath Museum** (housing the original Lion Capital of Ashoka).
- **Strategic Preparations:** The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department and ASI convened a high-level meeting in Lucknow to finalize the nomination dossier. Key focuses include robust site management, stakeholder engagement, sustainable tourism development, and ecological conservation. A stakeholder consultation involving local communities and Buddhist circuit development is planned ahead of the UNESCO review in **September**.
- **Prospective Impact:** If inscribed, Sarnath will become **Uttar Pradesh's fourth UNESCO World Heritage Site**, and notably the first Buddhist site in the state to receive such recognition—joining the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Fatehpur Sikri in Agra.

KSFE Becomes First Miscellaneous NBFC in India to Cross ₹1 Lakh Crore Turnover

In the News: Kerala State Financial Enterprises (KSFE) became the **first miscellaneous non-banking financial company (MNBC/NBFC)** in India to achieve a **business turnover of ₹1 lakh crore**, a milestone announced as recent news.

Key Points:

- **Historic Turnover Achievement :** KSFE crossed the ₹1 lakh crore turnover mark, becoming the first MNBC in India to do so.
- **Rapid Growth: Doubling in Four Years :** The company's turnover grew from ₹50,000 crore to ₹1 lakh crore in just four years—a strong indicator of public trust and demand.
- **Celebratory Event in Kerala :** A ceremony was scheduled at the Central Stadium, with Kerala Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** inaugurating the celebrations. The event is chaired by Finance Minister **K. N. Balagopal**.
- **Launch of Onam-themed Gift Card :** During the event, Food and Civil Supplies Minister **G. R. Anil** launched the "**KSFE Onam Samriddhi Gift Card**".

- **Celebrity Guest of Honour** : Actor and KSFE brand ambassador **Suraj Venjaramoodu** graced the occasion as the guest of honour.
- **Significant Financial Contributions** : Over the past four years, KSFE provided **₹504 crore** in financial assistance via interest waivers, contributed **₹920 crore** to the Kerala government, and holds **≈₹8,925 crore** in fixed deposits with the state treasury.
- **Strong Profitability** : In the fiscal year 2024–25, KSFE posted a profit of **₹512 crore**, underlining its consistent profitability.
- **New Brand Tagline** : The company unveiled its new tagline: **“KSFE: The Courage of Kerala”**, reflecting its identity and mission.

Tamil Nadu's State Education Policy 2025

In the News: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin unveiled the **Tamil Nadu State Education Policy (SEP) 2025** at the Anna Centenary Library in Chennai, marking the state as the first in India to formally adopt its own comprehensive school education policy in direct opposition to the Centre's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The 230-page policy document was developed by a 14-member committee headed by retired Delhi High Court Chief Justice D. Murugesan and represents a significant political and educational statement against what the state considers central imposition.

Key Points:

- **Policy Framework and Vision:** The SEP 2025 aims to build an inclusive, equitable, resilient, and future-ready school education system that nurtures every child's potential while upholding social justice and empowering learners with 21st-century skills rooted in Tamil Nadu's cultural heritage. The policy is designed as a **living document** to be reviewed every three years, with its future readiness section updated annually to adapt to technological and economic changes.
- **Two-Language Formula:** Tamil Nadu firmly maintains its bilingual policy of Tamil and English, rejecting the NEP's three-language formula that often includes Hindi. Tamil will be compulsory from Classes 1 to 10 across all schools regardless of board affiliation (CBSE, ICSE, or State board), reinforcing the state's linguistic identity and opposition to perceived Hindi imposition.
- **Examination Reforms:** The policy implements significant changes to reduce student stress by **abolishing board examinations for Class 11** with immediate effect, reversing a 2017 AIADMK government decision. The SEP completely **scraps public exams for Classes 3, 5, and 8** that were proposed under NEP, maintaining a **no-detention policy until Class 8** to prevent early commercialization of education.
- **Undergraduate Admissions:** For arts and science courses, **admissions will be based on consolidated scores from Classes 11 and 12** rather than common entrance examinations, directly opposing the NEP's standardized testing approach. The state continues its strong opposition to NEET for medical admissions, arguing it disadvantages students from state syllabus backgrounds.
- **Foundational Learning Initiatives:** The **Ennum Ezhuthum Mission** remains the flagship initiative, ensuring every child in Classes 1-3 achieves age-appropriate reading, writing, and arithmetic skills in both Tamil and English. Bridge courses and remedial programs will support students in Classes 4 and 5 who need additional help.
- **Digital and Future Skills Integration:** The policy emphasizes **21st-century competencies including AI, robotics, coding, critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy**. The **TN-SPARK programme** will expand AI and robotics education, while platforms like **Kalvi TV and the Manarkeni App** will be upgraded for blended learning with virtual labs and interactive content.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Schools will be modernized with smart classrooms, laboratories, and green infrastructure including rainwater harvesting and solar panels. **Vetri Palligal (Schools of Excellence)** and Model Schools will serve as hubs for replicating best practices across the state.
- **Social Justice and Inclusion:** Special provisions target **Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, first-generation learners, and children with special needs** through barrier-free infrastructure, scholarships, mentoring, and culturally responsive teaching practices. **Annual equity audits** will be mandated at school and district levels to ensure inclusive education.
- **Teacher Development:** A comprehensive professional development ecosystem will utilize the **Payirchi Paarvai digital platform**, modular training, and peer mentoring. Teachers in tribal and disadvantaged areas will receive context-specific support to address regional educational challenges.

- **Funding Dispute with Centre:** The policy release comes amid a bitter funding dispute where Tamil Nadu alleges the Centre has withheld **Rs 2,291.30 crore in education funds** under the Samagra Shiksha scheme as retaliation for non-implementation of NEP. The state has approached the Supreme Court seeking release of these funds with 6% annual interest.

Maharashtra Launches 'Disha Abhiyan' for Uniform Education of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

In the News: Maharashtra has launched 'Disha Abhiyan', India's first uniform curriculum specifically designed for the education of students with intellectual disabilities. This initiative has been implemented across 453 special schools in the state, aiming to ensure uniform and quality education for these students, reflecting the state's commitment to inclusive education.

Key Points:

- **Campaign Launch:** Maharashtra initiated 'Disha Abhiyan' as a pioneering state-wide program to provide a standardized curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities. The curriculum has been developed by the Jai Vakil Foundation and certified by the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID).
- **Curriculum Details:** The curriculum incorporates 80 years of expertise from the Jai Vakil Foundation, global best practices, and research-based teaching methods. It is adapted for varying intellectual abilities and includes life skills and vocational training to promote independence among students.
- **Implementation Scale:** 'Disha Abhiyan' has been rolled out in 453 special schools throughout Maharashtra, reaching over 18,000 students and involving more than 2,600 educators trained under this program.
- **Certification and Partnership:** The program's curriculum is NIEPID-certified, ensuring a national quality standard and credibility. The initiative was formalized through an MoU between NIEPID and Jai Vakil Foundation to scale up structured education for children with intellectual disabilities across the state and potentially beyond.
- **Vision and Impact:** The campaign aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for an inclusive and self-reliant India, aiming to eliminate disparities in education quality, improve learning outcomes, and promote social inclusion of intellectually disabled students.

Environment Protection (Management of Contaminated Sites) Rules, 2025

In the News: The Government of India notified the Environment Protection (Management of Contaminated Sites) Rules, 2025, marking India's first comprehensive legal framework to identify, assess, and remediate chemically contaminated sites. This step addresses the urgent need for remediation of industrial, landfill, and hazardous waste dump sites, protecting human health and the environment.

Key Points:

- **Notification and Scope:** The Rules were notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. They apply to all sites contaminated by hazardous or toxic substances posing risks to human health or the environment, such as post-industrial landfills, spill sites, and abandoned chemical handling facilities. However, sites contaminated by radioactive waste, mining, marine oil spills, and solid waste dumps are excluded.
- **Structured Identification Process:** Local bodies or district administrations must submit half-yearly lists of suspected contaminated sites to the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) for uploading to a centralized portal. The SPCB conducts a preliminary assessment within 90 days. If contamination exceeds screening levels, it is designated a probable contaminated site. A detailed site investigation then follows (within 3 months). Sites exceeding response levels for any of the 189 hazardous substances listed under waste management rules are officially declared "contaminated"; otherwise, they are delisted.
- **Remediation and Clean-up:** The "Responsible Person" (polluter or site owner) must prepare and submit a remediation plan to the State Board within six months, detailing site-specific clean-up targets, methods, costs, timelines, and safety safeguards. The plan is implemented after State Board approval. If the polluter is unidentified or unable to pay, remediation costs are initially borne by the central and state governments, recoverable from the polluter if identified later. For orphan sites (no identifiable polluter), government funding ensures clean-up and ongoing monitoring.
- **Polluter Pays Principle:** Responsibility for assessment and remediation costs lies with the polluter. This extends to any costs initially borne by the government, which must be repaid within three months if a responsible party is found.

Iron-Age Settlement Discovered in Topra Kalan

In the News: Archaeologists announced the discovery of evidence from around 1500 BCE in Topra Kalan village, Haryana, revealing a significant Iron-Age settlement. This find is regarded as a landmark in understanding the transition period between the Late Harappan (Bronze Age) and early Iron Age in Northern India.

Key Points:

- **Archaeological Discovery:** A Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey by the Haryana Archaeology and Museums Department, along with IIT Kanpur, uncovered signs of a well-organized ancient settlement at depths of 4–5m beneath Topra Kalan. Human habitation in the area is estimated to date back nearly 3,500 years (~1500 BCE).
- **Material Culture and Artifacts:** The site yielded Painted Grey Ware (PGW), a hallmark of the Vedic Iron Age, alongside stamped pottery, black-and-red ware, black-on-red ware, black ware, beads, and moulded bricks. These represent both the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age cultures in North India.
- **Structural Remains:** Surveys revealed buried architectural features, including walls, platforms, room-like enclosures, and a dome-like construction—possibly a Buddhist stupa. These findings show advanced planning and continuous habitation.
- **Links to Buddhist and Mauryan Era:** Topra Kalan is historically significant as the original site of the Ashokan pillar, which was relocated to Delhi by Firoz Shah Tughlaq in the 14th century. Historical accounts from Sir Alexander Cunningham and Hiuen Tsang indicate that Topra Kalan functioned as a Buddhist center, and the discovery of stupa-like structures further supports this.
- **Survey and Preservation:** Given the site is under an inhabited village, large-scale excavations are challenging. Instead, scientific surveys and limited explorations—involving local artifact discoveries during daily activities—have informed current understanding. Local opposition to displacement for excavation has been noted.

National Sports Governance and Anti-Doping Bills Passed by Lok Sabha

In the News: The Lok Sabha passed two landmark Bills—the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025 and the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill, 2025—ushering in sweeping reforms targeting transparency, accountability, and global alignment in Indian sports administration as the country gears up for a bid to host the 2036 Olympics.

Key Points:

- **Reform Milestone:** Described as the “single biggest sports reform since independence,” these Bills aim to overhaul sports governance, ensure athlete welfare, and reinforce ethical conduct in line with Olympic and international standards.
- **National Sports Bodies:** Establishes the National Olympic Committee (NOC), National Paralympic Committee (NPC), and National/Regional Sports Federations for each sport, all aligned with international federations.
- **National Sports Board (NSB):** Constituted by the central government, the NSB will recognize, register, and monitor sports bodies, and can de-recognize federations for irregularities, fund mismanagement, or lack of fair elections.
- **Leadership Provisions:** Mandates women’s representation and inclusion of eminent athletes in governing bodies. The age cap for administrators is generally 70, with possible extension to 75 under international rules.
- **National Sports Tribunal:** A powerful judicial body to resolve sports disputes—its rulings are binding and can only be challenged at the Supreme Court.
- **Transparency Measures:** All recognized bodies receiving government funding now come under the Right to Information Act (RTI), except the BCCI, which is exempt unless it receives substantial government aid. The move sparked debate on transparency and centralization.
- **Public Interest Exemptions:** The central government may exempt national bodies or affiliates from certain provisions if deemed necessary in the national sporting interest.
- **WADA Alignment:** Gives operational independence to the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA), removing government oversight and resolving World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) concerns over autonomy.
- **Board Powers:** The National Anti-Doping Board loses powers over NADA’s operations, boosting compliance with the global anti-doping code. Appeal panels now come under direct government purview to ensure checks and balances.
- **Accreditation & Testing:** Mandates that all dope testing labs must obtain and maintain WADA accreditation.

India’s 3rd Voluntary National Review on SDGs

In the News: NITI Aayog presented India’s third Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) convened by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in New York. The report showcases a decade of decisive policy action in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Key Points:

- **VNR Presentation:** NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Suman Bery delivered the report, reaffirming India's strong commitment to the SDGs and emphasizing the transformation of sustainable development into a national movement through economic growth, infrastructure investment, and targeted welfare schemes.
- **Collaborative and Inclusive Approach:** The VNR 2025 was developed through a consultative, whole-of-government and whole-of-society process. It involved State/UT governments, civil society, development partners, the private sector, and supported by UNDP through SDG Coordination and Acceleration Centres.
- **Poverty Alleviation:** Approximately 248 million people escaped multidimensional poverty between 2013-14 and 2022-23.
- **Food Security:** The PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana delivered nutritional support to millions, benefiting about 81.35 crore people. The scheme will continue for five more years from 2024.
- **Health & Nutrition:** Schemes like POSHAN Abhiyaan and Ayushman Bharat expanded access to nutrition and healthcare. Out-of-pocket health expenditure fell from 62.6% (2014-15) to 39.4% (2020-21).
- **Digital Public Infrastructure:** The Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity and UPI enabled inclusive and transparent service delivery. India accounted for 48.5% of global real-time payment volume in FY2025.
- **Clean Energy Transition:** Major initiatives include the National Green Hydrogen Mission, PM-KUSUM, and PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.
- **Innovation & Growth:** India became the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem. Schemes such as PM Gati Shakti and Make in India advanced next-generation infrastructure and industrial growth.
- **Localisation of SDGs:** India used tools like the SDG India Index, North-Eastern Region District SDG Index, and National Multidimensional Poverty Index to localise SDG implementation and promote data-driven governance.
- **Global Leadership & Cooperation:** India's VNR highlights leadership in digital public infrastructure and South-South Cooperation, reflecting its role as a trusted partner for developing nations.
- **Alignment with National Vision:** The report aligns Agenda 2030 with the national vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, aiming for a developed India by its centenary, integrating inclusion, innovation, and institutional strength.

E20 Fuel in India: Meaning, Benefits, and Government Clarification

In the News: The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and other government bodies issued multiple clarifications addressing public concerns about E20 fuel—a petrol blend containing 20% ethanol. They emphasized that the effects on mileage and engine health are minimal, while highlighting environmental, economic, and energy-security benefits.

Key Points:

- **Meaning of E20 Fuel :** E20 fuel is a blend of 20% ethanol and 80% gasoline. Ethanol, a biofuel, is produced from renewable plant-based sources such as sugarcane, corn, or biomass.
- **Government's Clarifications & Reassurances :** The government dismissed claims that E20 severely affects mileage, engine health, or insurance coverage, calling such concerns "fear-mongering" or based on misleading information. They clarified that using E20 does **not void vehicle insurance**—any rumors otherwise stem from misinterpretation of posts on social media. Studies by ARAI, Indian Oil, IIP, and SIAM show **negligible engine damage** and only a **1-2% drop in fuel efficiency** in E20-compatible vehicles.
- **Environmental & Economic Benefits : Higher Performance Quality:** E20 enhances the fuel's octane rating—from RON 91 to around RON 95—improving anti-knocking and delivering better acceleration and smoother ride quality, particularly in modern engines.
- **Emission Reduction:** Carbon emissions drop by ~30% compared to E10, based on lifecycle studies by NITI Aayog showing up to 65% (sugarcane ethanol) and 50% (maize ethanol) lower GHG emissions vs. petrol.
- **Boost to Agriculture & Economy:** E20 roll-out supports farmers by increasing ethanol demand, contributing up to ₹40,000 crore in farmer payments and saving approximately ₹43,000 crore in foreign exchange due to reduced oil imports in 2024-25 alone. Since 2014-15, blending has saved over ₹1.44 lakh crore in foreign exchange, substituted 245 lakh tonnes of crude oil, and cut CO₂ emissions equivalent to planting 30 crore trees.
- **Vehicle Compatibility :** Most vehicles manufactured post-2023 are already E20-compliant. Older vehicles might see a marginal drop in efficiency, but this can be mitigated through updated engine tuning and E20-compatible components. Some automakers (e.g., Maruti, Hyundai, Tata) are rolling out vehicles with fuel systems and engines adapted for E20. Globally, ethanol blends up to E25 are widely used—Brazil, for instance, has long operated on E20-E27.5 with high flex-fuel compatibility.

- **Speed of Rollout** : India achieved its E20 rollout goal **five years ahead of the original 2030 target**, marking a significant acceleration in its sustainable energy transition.

Indian Ports Bill, 2025

In the News: The Lok Sabha passed the **Indian Ports Bill, 2025**, aiming to modernize India's port governance by replacing the nearly century-old Indian Ports Act of 1908. The legislation marks a significant step in aligning India's maritime sector with contemporary global standards

Key Points:

- **Bill Passed – August 12, 2025** : The Lok Sabha approved the Indian Ports Bill, 2025, via voice vote amid opposition protests. The legislation is intended to simplify port procedures, digitalize operations, and promote ease of doing business (EoDB).
- **Replacing the Indian Ports Act, 1908** : The new Bill replaces colonial-era provisions, introducing modern, streamlined regulations to foster integrated port development across the country.
- **Institutional Framework: Maritime State Development Council (MSDC)** : The Bill establishes the **Maritime State Development Council**, headed by the Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, with representatives from coastal states, the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, and MoPSW. It will advise on national port development, tariff transparency, and data-driven planning.
- **State Maritime Boards & Dispute Resolution Committees** : Statutory recognition is given to **State Maritime Boards**, which will manage non-major ports. The Bill mandates **Dispute Resolution Committees** at the state level for port-related disputes, with appeals allowed to the High Courts. Civil courts are excluded from these matters.
- **Tariff Regulation and Data Transparency** : Major port tariffs will continue to be set by their Port Authorities or Boards. For non-major ports, State Maritime Boards or authorized concessionaires will set tariffs. All tariffs must be published electronically, accompanied by transparent collection and submission of port data (e.g., cargo volumes, vessel traffic).
- **Environment, Safety & Sustainability** : The Bill mandates environmental compliance—including adherence to **MARPOL** and the **Ballast Water Management Convention**—as well as waste reception, disaster preparedness, pollution control, and emergency management procedures. Ports will also be subject to central audits with penalties for violations.
- **Efficiency, Connectivity & Economic Benefits** : By digitizing operations and simplifying processes, the Bill is expected to reduce logistics costs, speed up cargo movement, and enhance hinterland connectivity. It also foresees job creation in port operations, logistics, warehousing, and allied sectors, and improved infrastructure for exporters and MSMEs.
- **Fostering Cooperative Federalism and Maritime Vision 2047** : The Bill embodies PM Modi's "Ports for Prosperity" vision, reinforcing cooperative federalism through shared decision-making via the MSDC, and supports long-term maritime growth aligning with India's ambition to become a global maritime power by 2047.

SHRESTH: India's First State Health Regulatory Excellence Index

In the News: The Union Health Ministry introduced **SHRESTH**—the first-ever **State Health Regulatory Excellence Index**. Launched virtually by Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava and the Drugs Controller General of India, Dr Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi, this initiative aims to benchmark and bolster state-level drug regulatory systems through a transparent, data-driven framework.

Key Points:

- **What Is SHRESTH?**
SHRESTH stands for **State Health Regulatory Excellence Index**, a virtual gap-assessment tool that ranks and strengthens drug regulatory authorities across Indian states and Union Territories to ensure consistent drug safety and quality.
- **Administering Authority & Cooperative Launch** : Championed by the **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare**, SHRESTH is implemented by the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO)**. It was launched in a virtual meeting that included health secretaries, principal health secretaries, and drug regulators from across states and UTs.
- **Goals of the Index** : Facilitate **transparent, data-driven benchmarking** of state drug regulators. Promote **targeted improvements** in areas like infrastructure, digitization, and human resources. Enhance **public trust** in the quality and efficacy of medicines.
- **Evaluation Framework & Themes** : **Manufacturing States**: Assessed on **27 indicators** across five themes—Human Resources, Infrastructure, Licensing Activities, Surveillance Activities, and Responsiveness.
- **Primarily Distribution States/UTs**: Evaluated on **23 indicators** under the same thematic areas.

- **Data Flow & Scoring Mechanism** : States must submit data on predefined metrics to the CDSCO by the **25th of every month**. Scoring occurs on the **1st of the following month**, with rankings shared transparently across all states and UTs.
- **Global Alignment & Aspirations** : SHRESTH builds on India's WHO-recognized **Maturity Level 3 (ML3)** status for vaccine regulation, with the aim to elevate **medicine regulation** to the same global benchmark. This aligns with WHO's Global Benchmarking Tool under WHA Resolution 67.20.

Cabinet Approves ₹4,600 Crore Semiconductor Manufacturing Projects in Odisha, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh

In the News: The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved **four new semiconductor manufacturing projects** under the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)**. With these approvals, ISM now counts **a total of ten sanctioned semiconductor facilities**, cumulatively valued at approximately **₹1.6 lakh crore** across six states.

Key Points:

- **Overview of the Cabinet Approval** : Four new semiconductor projects were approved with a combined investment of **₹4,600 crore**, bringing the count of ISM-endorsed facilities to ten, with total investments reaching around **₹1.6 lakh crore** spread across six states.
- **Project Locations & Companies:**
- **Odisha:** Two units by **SiCsem** and **3D Glass Solutions Inc.**, both to be built in Bhubaneswar's Info Valley.
- **Punjab:** Expansion by **Continental Device India Pvt Ltd (CDIL)** in Mohali.
- **Andhra Pradesh:** A new facility by **Advanced System in Package (ASIP) Technologies**. **Technological Capabilities & Capacities:**
- **SiCsem (Odisha):** First **commercial compound semiconductor fab**, with annual capacity of **60,000 wafers** and **96 million packaged units**, producing for sectors like defense, EVs, railways, data centres, appliances, and solar inverters.
- **3D Glass (Odisha):** Advanced **glass-based semiconductor packaging** (3D heterogeneous integration) technology, enabling miniaturization and performance efficiency in advanced electronics.
- **CDIL (Punjab):** Expanding production of **high-power discrete semiconductors**—MOSFETs, IGBTs, Schottky diodes, transistors—using silicon and SiC, with a capacity of around **158.38 million units annually**.
- **ASIP (Andhra Pradesh):** Under a technology tie-up with South Korea's APACT Co. Ltd, the plant will produce **96 million units annually** meant for mobile phones, set-top boxes, automobile electronics, and general consumer products.
- **Employment & Ecological Impact:** The four projects collectively are expected to generate about **2,034 direct skilled jobs**, in addition to numerous indirect employment opportunities across the electronics manufacturing ecosystem.

Two More Defence Industrial Corridors to Boost India's Self-Reliance in Defence

In the News: The Government of India announced the approval of **two new Defence Industrial Corridors**, one each in **Maharashtra** and **Assam**, as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. These corridors are expected to strengthen India's self-reliance in defence manufacturing, generate employment, and foster regional economic development. This expansion builds on the initial defence corridors in **Uttar Pradesh** and **Tamil Nadu**, which have already demonstrated significant progress.

Key Points:

- **New Corridors Approved** : Two new Defence Industrial Corridors are set to be established—one in **Maharashtra** and another in **Assam**.
- **Purpose & Strategic Goal** : These corridors aim to boost **indigenous defence production**, **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, job creation, and economic empowerment in defense sectors. **Background: Existing Corridors**
- India currently operates two defence corridors:
 - **Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor (UPDIC)**
 - **Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor (TNDIC)**
- Both were launched to promote local manufacturing, reduce imports, and support exports.
- **Progress in Existing Corridors:**
 - In **Uttar Pradesh**, ₹28,475 crore in investments have been attracted; 57 companies allocated land, with 87 more in the pipeline. A BrahMos missile manufacturing unit was inaugurated in Lucknow, and an integration and testing facility covers 200 acres.
 - The corridors have created thousands of jobs and facilitated development in high-tech defence sectors, particularly with supportive state infrastructure like single-window clearances and reliable utilities.

- **Proposed Corridor Details:**

- **Maharashtra:** Plans include industrial clusters in regions like **Sambhajinagar–Ahilyanagar–Pune** and **Nashik**, aimed at positioning the state as a future hub for defence and aerospace manufacturing.
- **Assam:** A corridor in the northeast is expected to boost regional economic growth and strengthen the nation's strategic footprint in defense production.

India Achieves 100 GW Solar PV Manufacturing Milestone Under ALMM

In the News: India's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) announced that solar photovoltaic (PV) module manufacturing capacity listed under the **Approved List of Models and Manufacturers (ALMM)** has reached **100 GW**—a leap from just **2.3 GW** in 2014. This marks a significant milestone in India's journey toward a self-reliant solar manufacturing ecosystem.

Key Points:

- **Milestone Achieved:** India has attained **100 GW** of solar PV module manufacturing capacity under ALMM as of August 13, 2025, according to MNRE.
- **Growth Trajectory:** Capacity under ALMM has skyrocketed from **2.3 GW in 2014** to 100 GW in 2025, reflecting rapid industry expansion.
- **ALMM Origins:** The ALMM framework was instituted by MNRE with the Order issued on **January 2, 2019**, and the first list published in **March 2021**, endorsing around **8.2 GW** initially.
- **Manufacturing Landscape:** The current ecosystem encompasses 100 manufacturers operating 123 module manufacturing units across India. In contrast, the scenario in 2021 included just 21 manufacturers.
- **Government Acknowledgement:** **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** hailed the development on X, calling it “yet another milestone towards self-reliance,” highlighting India's strengthening clean-energy manufacturing capabilities. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi termed this a “historic milestone” and credited initiatives like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for high-efficiency solar modules for facilitating the expansion.
- **Alignment with Broader Goals:** Achieving this milestone advances India's target of reaching 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, further reinforcing its push toward Atmanirbhar Bharat and global decarbonization commitments.

India and Singapore Reinforce Strategic Partnership at 3rd Ministerial Roundtable in New Delhi

In the News: India hosted the **3rd India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR)** in New Delhi—a high-level mechanism aimed at strengthening the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** between the two nations, established during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Singapore in September 2024

Key Points:

- **Roundtable Held in New Delhi:** The 3rd ISMR took place on August 13, 2025, following its inaugural edition in New Delhi in September 2022 and the second in Singapore in August 2024
- **High-Level Participation:** From India: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman; External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar; Commerce & Industry Minister Piyush Goyal; and Railways, IT, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. From Singapore: Deputy Prime Minister and Trade Minister Gan Kim Yong; Coordinating Minister for National Security & Home Affairs K. Shanmugam; Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan; Digital Development Minister Josephine Teo; Manpower Minister Tan See Leng; and Acting Transport Minister Jeffrey Siow.
- **Six Pillars of Cooperation Reviewed:** Progress was assessed across the pillars of Advanced Manufacturing, Connectivity, Digitalisation, Healthcare & Medicine, Skills Development, and Sustainability. New initiatives within these domains were also identified for enhanced collaboration.
- **Government-Industry Synergy Highlighted:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar praised the productive interaction with the India-Singapore Business Roundtable (ISBR) delegation, noting that “synergy between Government & Industry is key to unlocking the next phase of India-Singapore ties”.
- **Agreements Finalised:** Around **10 agreements**, spanning key cooperation areas aligned with the ISMR pillars, were finalized and are expected to be formally unveiled during the upcoming prime ministers' meeting.
- **Diplomatic Engagements:** The visiting Singaporean ministers called on President Droupadi Murmu and visited Mumbai to assess Singaporean investments, including maritime engagements and a \$453 million data centre by CapitaLand Investment in Navi Mumbai. MoUs such as one from Mapletree Investments involving ₹3,000 crore in Maharashtra were also part of the visit's economic engagements.

State Health Regulatory Excellence Index (SHRESTH)

In the News: The Union Health Ministry launched the **State Health Regulatory Excellence Index (SHRESTH)**—the country's first national framework to benchmark and strengthen state drug regulatory systems. The virtual launch was led by **Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava** in the presence of **Dr. Rajeev Singh Raghuvanshi**, Drug Controller General of India, with participation from health secretaries and drug controllers across states and Union Territories.

Key Points:

- **Objective:** SHRESTH is a **transparent, data-driven evaluation tool** conceived by the **Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO)**. Its aim is to benchmark, evaluate, and enhance performance of state/UT drug regulatory systems, ensuring **safety, quality, and efficacy of medicines** nationwide.
- **Categories & Evaluation Framework:**
 - **Manufacturing States** are assessed on **27 indicators**, while **Primarily Distribution States/UTs** are evaluated on **23 indicators**.
 - These indicators span **five key thematic domains**: Human Resources, Infrastructure, Licensing Activities, Surveillance Activities, Responsiveness.
- **Data Submission & Scoring Mechanism:** States submit monthly data by the **25th of each month** to CDSCO. The scores are calculated on the **1st of the following month** and shared with all states and UTs—creating a continuous improvement feedback loop.
- **Purpose & Tools:**
 - Acts as a **virtual gap-assessment tool**, guiding states towards regulatory maturity certification.
 - Emphasizes **cooperative federalism**, encouraging states to share best practices and learn from top performers.
- **Global Alignment & Strategic Vision:**
 - SHRESTH's framework aligns with **WHO's Global Benchmarking Tool**, aiming to elevate drug regulation to global standards, similar to India's WHO ML-3 certification for vaccines.
 - Reinforces India's vision as the **"Pharmacy of the World"**, ensuring medicines are trusted at both domestic and global levels.
- **Complementary Initiatives:** Several capacity-building and regulatory-strengthening measures were announced, including:
 - Extension of the **Not of Standard Quality (NSQ) dashboard** to all states.
 - Plans for a **Drug Regulatory Systems symposium**, along with expanded **joint trainings and audits**.
- **Stakeholder Engagement & Implementation Approach:** The launch involved health secretaries and drug regulators from across the country. SHRESTH is promoted as more than a scorecard—rather, a **reform roadmap**, supporting harmonized application of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and promoting structured knowledge sharing.

New OCI Rules Tighten Overseas Citizenship Regulations

In the News: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) issued a gazette notification tightening the rules governing Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) status. Under the revised regulations, OCI registration or cards may now be cancelled under stricter legal grounds to safeguard the integrity of India's overseas citizen scheme.

Key Points:

- **Grounds for Cancellation Expanded:** OCI status will be revoked if a cardholder:
 - Is **sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more**.
 - Is **charge-sheeted** for an offence carrying a punishment of seven years or more.
- **No More Five-year Limitation:** Previously, revocation for a two-year sentence was only applicable if it occurred within five years of registration. The updated rule removes this five-year time cap, meaning any such conviction at any time is now grounds for cancellation.
- **Global Applicability:** The cancellation rules apply even if the conviction or charge-sheet happens abroad, provided the offence is recognized under Indian law.
- **Broader Legal Context:** These changes were made under the authority of clause (da) of Section 7D of the Citizenship Act, 1955, reinforcing the MHA's power to revoke OCI status on more stringent legal grounds.
- **Aim & Rationale:** The government's move is aimed at strengthening the legal framework around OCI privileges and ensuring they are not exploited by individuals involved in serious criminal activities.

IBC Amendment Bill 2025

In the News: The **Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman**, introduced the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2025** in Lok Sabha. The proposed amendments aim to overhaul India's insolvency framework—accelerating processes, empowering stakeholders, and aligning with global best practices.

Key Points:

- **Purpose & Context:** The Bill follows three years of consultations with stakeholders, the Insolvency Law Committee, and public input, aiming to resolve implementation challenges under the IBC and strengthen its effectiveness.
- **Empowering Creditors & Streamlining Process:** Introduces a creditor-initiated insolvency resolution process, allowing an out-of-court start within a debtor-in-possession model—keeping existing management for business continuity. Amendments to Section 7 mandate that applications by financial creditors be admitted solely based on default, using information utility records as sufficient proof—bypassing additional grounds and reducing delays.
- **Curbing Procedural Misuse:** Limits **withdrawals of insolvency applications** both before COC constitutions and after resolution plan invitations—closing loopholes. Makes **Committee of Creditors (CoC) approval mandatory** for withdrawal under Section 12A, ensuring transparency and discouraging early out-of-court exits.
- **Enhanced Oversight & Asset Recovery:** CoC is now empowered to supervise the **liquidation process**, including replacing liquidators via a 66% vote—streamlining proceedings. Enhancements include extended look-back periods and enabling creditors to pursue **avoidance transactions, fraudulent, or wrongful trading** cases to maximize recoveries.
- **Preserving Viable Entities:** Adds new subsections to **Section 33**, enabling the **Adjudicating Authority (AA)** to **restore CIRP**, upon CoC request, in exceptional cases—averting premature liquidation. This follows precedents like the JSW-BPSL case.
- **Group & Cross-Border Insolvency Frameworks:** Provisions introduce a **group insolvency framework**, facilitating coordinated resolution across corporate groups to preserve value. A **cross-border insolvency framework** is also proposed to align with international norms—protecting stakeholder interests effectively.
- **Robust Regulatory Tools & Digitalization:** Empowers the **Central Government** to notify an **electronic portal** for handling IBC processes. Confers rule-making powers for cross-border insolvency and detailed governance frameworks.

All about Assam's new arms licence portal for 'indigenous citizens' in 'vulnerable areas'

In the News: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launched an **online portal** via the state's **Sewa Setu platform**. It enables **indigenous citizens** of Assam, residing in **vulnerable, remote, or "sensitive" areas**, to apply for **arms licences** under the **Arms Act, 1959**, and **Arms Rules, 2016**. The portal aims to empower residents to act as "first responders" in emergencies where police reinforcement may be delayed.

Key Points:

- **Rationale & Purpose:** The scheme was approved by the Assam Cabinet in **May 2025**, aimed at enabling indigenous citizens to protect themselves amid perceived **demographic and security threats**—especially in areas experiencing rapid population changes. CM Sarma emphasized that firearms possession serves as a **deterrent** and helps citizens act as "first responders" in situations where police help could take hours.
- **Eligibility Criteria:**
 - Applicants must be **indigenous citizens of Assam** with at least **three generations'** lineage in the state.
 - Must be **21 years or older, physically and mentally fit**, and have completed recognized **firearms training**.
 - Should reside in an area deemed "vulnerable or remote" by district administration or security agencies; though not precisely defined, regions with majority Bengali-origin Muslim populations are often cited examples.
 - Applicants must have **no criminal record**, and possess a verifiable **safe storage facility** for firearms.
- **Application Process & Oversight:**
 - The portal is part of the **Sewa Setu** citizen-services system. Applicants must submit identity, caste, and residence documents; firearms training certification; medical fitness certificates; an undertaking on safe use/storage; and Aadhaar.
 - A list of **accredited trainers**, such as retired police or army personnel, will be maintained locally.
 - Licences granted under this scheme will remain valid for **five years**.
 - The approval process involves **multi-layered scrutiny**, including district-level assessment, police verification, intelligence input, and socioeconomic background checks. Implementation oversight is entrusted to **district commissioners and Senior Superintendents of Police**.

- **Target Regions & Social Context:**

- The initiative targets districts such as Dhubri, Morigaon, Barpeta, Nagaon, South Salmara-Mankachar, and localities like Rupahi, Dhing, and Jania—areas experiencing demographic shifts, leading indigenous groups to feel marginalized or insecure.
- The move intertwines administrative policy with identity politics, positioning the state government as protector of indigenous communities amidst changing demographics.

Narendra Modi Sets Record with Longest Independence Day Speech in India's History

In the News: On **August 15, 2025**, Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** delivered a historic Independence Day address from the Red Fort that lasted **103 minutes**, marking it the **longest-ever** speech by any Indian prime minister on this occasion. This surpassed his own previous record of **98 minutes** set in 2024.

Key Points:

- **Duration & Milestone:** Modi spoke for **103 minutes**, breaking his prior record of 98 minutes from last year. The speech began around **7:33 am** and ended approximately **9:16 am**. Narendra Modi breaks Indira Gandhi's record with 12 consecutive Independence Day addresses from Red Fort, second only to Nehru's 17.
- **Historic Consistency:** This was Modi's **12th consecutive Independence Day speech** from the Red Fort, surpassing **Indira Gandhi's** record of eleven. He now ranks second only to **Jawaharlal Nehru**, who delivered 17 in a row.
- **Record-Breaking Trajectory:**
 - Modi has consistently delivered longer speeches over the years. Highlights include: 2014: **65 minutes**
 - 2016: **96 minutes**
 - 2019: **92 minutes**
 - 2020: **90 minutes**
 - 2024: **98 minutes**
 - 2025: **103 minutes** (record-breaking)
- **Major Announcements (in this 103-minute speech):**
 - **Mission Sudarshan Chakra:** A defence initiative akin to an "Iron Dome," developed domestically to shield the nation from threats.
 - **GST Reforms ("Diwali Gift"):** Next-generation GST changes aimed at reducing taxes on essential goods and supporting MSMEs and local vendors.
 - **PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana:** A ₹1 lakh crore scheme to create **3.5 crore jobs** over two years, offering ₹15,000/month to young private-sector employees.
 - **High-Powered Demography Mission:** To tackle demographic challenges due to infiltration and illegal migration in border areas.

Nuclear Energy Expansion: Plans to increase nuclear capacity by over **tenfold by 2047**, including building 10 new reactors.

Pasang Wangchuk Sona ISRO Space Laboratory Inaugurated in Remote Arunachal Pradesh

In the News: On August 16, 2025, the Pasang Wangchuk Sona ISRO Space Laboratory was inaugurated by Education Minister Pasang Dorjee Sona at Mechuka Government Higher Secondary School in the remote Shi-Yomi district of Arunachal Pradesh. The facility, a collaboration between ISRO and the Muskaan Foundation, is designed to provide students with hands-on exposure to space science and technology, thereby fostering curiosity, innovation, and scientific thinking. *Inaugurated in honor of his late father, the lab aims to inspire local youth to dream bigger and explore science fearlessly.*

Key Points:

- **Remote and Strategic Location:** Situated in the secluded Mechuka area within Shi-Yomi district, the lab brings advanced space science education to one of India's most geographically isolated regions.
- **Collaborative Effort:** This initiative is a joint effort between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Muskaan Foundation, aimed at enhancing STEM education in rural and remote areas.
- **Dedicated to a Legacy:** Named the *Pasang Wangchuk Sona ISRO Space Laboratory* in memory of the minister's father, the lab stands as a tribute to his unwavering faith in the transformative power of education.
- **Minister's Vision:** Speaking at the inauguration, Minister Sona expressed deep pride and emotion, hoping the facility would become a space where children "dream bigger, explore science fearlessly, and reach for the stars."

- **Local Support and Participation:** The inauguration was attended by key local officials, including Deputy Commissioner Liyi Bagra, Deputy Director of School Education Tade Dabi, Muskaan Foundation's COO Pranesh Debnath, along with students, teachers, and community leaders.
- **Educational Impact:** The lab is envisioned as a hub for learning and innovation, designed to ignite scientific curiosity and encourage future generations in Shi-Yomi to pursue excellence in science and technology.

India Achieves Historic Deep Ocean Dives in Atlantic

In the News: Two Indian aquanauts—**Raju Ramesh** and **Commander (Retd) Jatinder Pal Singh**—achieved record-setting deep-sea dives in the **North Atlantic Ocean** aboard the French submersible **Nautile**. Ramesh descended to a depth of **4,025 metres**, followed the next day by Singh reaching **5,002 metres**, marking the **deepest human dives ever undertaken by India** in oceanic waters.

Key Points:

- **Elite Membership Achieved:** With these dives, **India joined the select group of fewer than six nations** to have conducted human-crewed dives beyond 5,000 m.
- **Indo-French Collaboration & Operational Training:** The dives were conducted in collaboration with **IFREMER**, France's premier marine research institute, aboard its submersible **Nautile**. A **five-member NIOT (National Institute of Ocean Technology) team** from Chennai gained hands-on experience in pre-dive operations, piloting, buoyancy control, sample collection, robotic manipulator operations, acoustic communication, and mission recovery protocols over these seven-hour dives.
- **Strategic Prelude to Samudrayaan Mission:** These missions serve as vital preparation for **India's Samudrayaan Mission**, part of the broader **Deep Ocean Mission**. The Samudrayaan project aims to deploy a **three-person crew** to a **6,000 m depth** using the indigenously built **MATSYA-6000** submersible by **2027**.
- **MATSYA-6000 Development Highlights:**
 - **Personnel Sphere:** Completed after **700 welding trials**, the personnel module for MATSYA-6000 signifies a breakthrough in pressure-resistant deep-sea design.
 - **Specifications:** The submersible is a **fourth-generation human-rated craft**, boasting **12-hour operational capacity** and **96-hour emergency endurance**. It integrates advanced technologies like **titanium hull**, **Li-Po battery systems**, **acoustic communications**, and **emergency escape mechanisms**.
 - **Trials Timeline:** Wet trials were concluded in early 2025 at L&T Shipyard, Tamil Nadu. Shallow-water tests up to **500 m** are set for **2026**, with deep-ocean trials in **2027**.
- **Blue Economy & Resource Potential:** The dive achievements underscore India's focus on the **blue economy**—leveraging its **11,098 km coastline** and vast **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** to sustainably harness marine resources. India has secured a contract with the **International Seabed Authority** to explore deep-ocean mineral resources at depths between **4,000–5,500 m**.

INTERNATIONAL

WHO Classifies Hepatitis D as Cancer-Causing

In the News: On **July 28, 2025**, coinciding with World Hepatitis Day, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has officially classified hepatitis D virus (HDV) as carcinogenic to humans, placing it alongside hepatitis B and C.

Key Points:

- **Carcinogenic Classification:** HDV is now designated a Group I carcinogen by IARC, officially recognized as cancer-causing.
- **Elevated Cancer Risk:** Co-infection with HDV and HBV results in a **2–6× higher risk** of liver cancer compared to hepatitis B alone.
- **Global Impact:** Over 300 million people worldwide live with chronic hepatitis (B, C, or D), leading to **~1.3 million deaths** annually—mostly due to cirrhosis and liver cancer.
- **Prevalence of HDV:** Approximately 5% of chronic HBV patients—around 12 million individuals—are co-infected with HDV. These populations include high-risk groups such as people who inject drugs, haemodialysis recipients, and indigenous communities.

- **Disease Severity:** HDV superinfection (on existing HBV) accelerates progression toward cirrhosis, liver failure, and hepatocellular carcinoma more rapidly than HBV alone.
- **Prevention Measures:** Hepatitis B vaccination offers protection against HDV, underscoring the importance of expanding HBV immunization.
- **Treatment Landscape:** Treatment options for HDV remain limited, though bulevirtide (sometimes with pegylated interferon) is emerging as an approved option in Europe.

Illinois Enacts Law Banning AI from Providing Therapy

In the News: On **August 4, 2025**, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed into law the **Wellness and Oversight for Psychological Resources Act (WOPR Act)**, prohibiting the use of artificial intelligence systems—like ChatGPT—to deliver therapeutic or mental health treatment. AI may still be used for administrative and auxiliary support, but not in direct clinical roles. The law is enforced by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR), and violations may result in fines up to **\$10,000** per offense.

Key Points:

- **Therapeutic AI Ban:** AI systems are barred from making clinical decisions, diagnosing, interacting in therapeutic ways, or directing treatment plans. Only licensed professionals can provide therapy.
- **Permitted Uses of AI:** AI tools may still assist with scheduling, billing, insurance processing, appointment reminders, and other administrative tasks. When used for supplementary support, the licensed professional must remain fully responsible, obtain informed consent, and notify patients.
- **Enforcement Mechanism:** IDFPR oversees enforcement and can levy fines up to **\$10,000 per violation**.
- **Motivating Concerns:** The law responds to incidents of AI chatbots giving harmful advice—such as suggesting drug use—and to warnings from mental health professionals about AI's lack of empathy, oversight, or accountability.
- **Groundbreaking Move:** Illinois is the **first U.S. state** to enact such a law, carving out clear boundaries between AI's role and human therapists in mental health care.

Russia Withdraws from 1987 INF Treaty

In the News: On **August 4, 2025**, Russia formally announced it would no longer consider itself bound by the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty** of 1987. The decision follows the treaty's effective collapse after the **U.S. withdrew in 2019**. The Russian Foreign Ministry cited recent Western missile deployments—such as U.S. systems in Australia and the Philippines—as creating a “direct threat” to Russia's national security.

Key Points:

- **Formal Exit After U.S. Withdrawal:** Russia confirmed its withdrawal nearly six years after the U.S. exited the treaty in 2019, a move that had already left the INF Treaty effectively inoperative.
- **Abolishing the Moratorium:** Moscow ended its **self-imposed moratorium** on deploying intermediate-range missiles, no longer observing the restrictions it had maintained despite the U.S. exit.
- **Security Concerns Cited:** The Russian Foreign Ministry blamed Western military exercises and new missile systems—especially U.S. deployments in the Asia-Pacific—for undermining the treaty's relevance and justifying its end.
- **Reemergence of Geopolitics:** Russia views U.S. and allied missile deployments near its borders—such as the Typhon system in Australia—as escalatory moves that invalidate the INF framework.
- **Missile Development Announced:** President Putin has confirmed full production and deployment of the **new "Oreshnik" hypersonic intermediate-range missile system**, to be placed near NATO borders.
- **Global Arms Control in Jeopardy:** With only the **New START treaty** still in force—and its future uncertain—Russia's INF withdrawal raises alarms about a spiraling arms race and diminishing safeguards.

FAO Food Price Index Increases

In the News: The FAO Food Price Index increased by 1.6% to 130.1 points, reaching its highest level since February 2023. This rise reflects increases in international prices of meat and vegetable oils, despite declines in cereals, dairy, and sugar prices.

Key Points:

- **Index Increase:** The FAO Food Price Index rose from 128 points in June 2025 to 130.1 in July 2025, marking a 1.6% monthly increase and a 7.6% rise compared to July 2024.

- **Price Drivers:** Meat prices increased 1.2% to a new record high, mainly due to higher prices for bovine and ovine meat. Vegetable oil prices surged 7.1% to a three-year high, driven by higher palm, soy, and sunflower oil quotations.
- **Declines in Other Commodities:** Cereal prices fell 0.8% to their lowest since 2020 due to lower wheat and sorghum prices despite some increases in maize and barley. Sugar prices decreased by 0.2%, marking five consecutive months of decline. Dairy prices edged down 0.1%, the first fall since April 2024, influenced by lower butter and milk powder prices.
- **Context:** Despite the increase, the index remains 18.8% below its peak in March 2022 following global supply shocks. The FAO Food Price Index provides a monthly benchmark of international prices for cereals, vegetable oils, sugar, meat, and dairy, reflecting global food commodity trade trends.

2025 Numbeo Index

In the News: In mid-2025, India ranked 67th globally in the Numbeo Safety Index with a score of 55.8, reflecting the country's position in global urban safety perceptions. Meanwhile, Middle Eastern cities, led by Abu Dhabi, dominated the top positions, with Abu Dhabi securing the number one spot for the ninth consecutive year.

Key Points:

- **National Ranking:** India placed 67th globally with a safety score of 55.8 in the mid-2025 Numbeo Safety Index, indicating moderate safety levels compared to other countries worldwide.
- **Safest Cities in India:** Mangalore was ranked as the safest city in India, scoring 74.2 and ranked 49th globally, credited to its low crime rates and effective civic infrastructure. Other top Indian cities for safety include Vadodara (69.2), Ahmedabad (68.2), Surat (66.6), and Jaipur (65.2).
- **Least Safe Cities in India:** New Delhi, Noida, and Ghaziabad were ranked among the most unsafe Indian cities, facing significant safety challenges, particularly concerning violent crime and safety for women.
- **Global Leaders:** Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, topped the global safety ranking for the ninth year in a row with a score of 88.8. Other Middle Eastern cities such as Ajman, Sharjah, Doha, and Dubai also featured prominently in the top five.
- **Methodology:** The Numbeo Safety Index is based on public perception surveys about safety during day and night, considering risks such as mugging, robbery, car theft, physical attacks, harassment, discrimination, and property and violent crimes. A higher score indicates greater perceived safety.
- **Implications:** The rankings highlight the importance of law enforcement, urban infrastructure, and public perception in urban safety. They underline regional disparities within India and globally, informing targeted urban safety policies.

Tuvalu: The World's First Planned Climate Migration

In the News: Tuvalu is set to begin the world's first planned climate migration under the Falepili Union Treaty, signed with Australia on November 9, 2023. The treaty provides a migration pathway for Tuvalu's population, threatened by climate change-induced sea-level rise, to relocate to Australia in the coming years.

Key Points:

- **Treaty Signing and Context:**
 - The Australia–Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty was signed on November 9, 2023, and entered into force on August 28, 2024, marking an unprecedented bilateral agreement focused on migration, security, and climate resilience.
 - The name 'Falepili' evokes "good neighbourliness, care, and mutual respect" in Tuvaluan tradition.
- **Planned Climate Migration:**
 - Australia will provide a special migration pathway, offering up to 280 Tuvaluan citizens per year the right to live, study, and work in Australia, with access to healthcare and key social services.
 - This pathway addresses Tuvalu's existential threat: the country of about 11,000 people is at risk of becoming uninhabitable from rising sea levels, with some estimates suggesting submersion by 2050.
- **Preservation of Sovereignty:**
 - The treaty recognizes that Tuvalu's statehood and sovereignty will continue, regardless of land loss, with the rights and responsibilities of statehood maintained under international law.
- **Broader Climate Support:**
 - Australia has committed funding to Tuvalu for climate adaptation initiatives, including expanding the Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project, which aims to reclaim land and protect existing territory.
- **Security and Bilateral Cooperation:**

- Australia pledges assistance in case of major disasters, health emergencies, or military threats to Tuvalu, and gains significant consultative power over Tuvalu's security and foreign engagements—a source of domestic debate in Tuvalu.

US trade truce with China: What is the agri trump card that Beijing holds

In the News: Amid a recent **90-day extension** of the U.S.–China trade truce—delaying looming tariff hikes—attention has turned to a strategic leverage point Beijing is wielding: its agri-commodity buying power. China's dramatic reduction in U.S. farm imports, particularly soybeans, has become a key bargaining chip, forcing the U.S. to continue negotiations.

Key Points:

- **Trade Truce Extended :** The U.S. and China agreed to extend their tariff truce for another 90 days, delaying increases that could have soared to triple-digit rates. This pause provides a critical window for ongoing dialogue and potential summit talks.
- **China's Agri-Leverage: The "Trump Card":** China has cut U.S. agricultural imports by nearly half—from **\$13.1 billion (Jan–Jun 2024)** to **\$6.4 billion (Jan–Jun 2025)**. Soybean imports dropped drastically to just **\$2.5 billion**, down from **\$17.9 billion** in 2022. Beyond soy, U.S. exports hit by this shift include corn, barley, cotton, beef, pork, poultry, tree nuts, and forest products. China is increasingly sourcing these from countries like Brazil, Argentina, Canada, and Paraguay.
- **Why It Matters :**
 - Agriculture is a political hotspot in the U.S., especially across the "Corn Belt" states. China's move undercuts American farmers in states from Iowa and Illinois to Texas and California.
 - This gives China strong leverage to push for continued talks and delay tariff escalation, as the U.S. aims to temper the political fallout in key farming regions.
- **U.S. Reaction :** President Trump publicly urged Xi Jinping to "quickly quadruple" U.S. soybean imports, in an effort to support American farmers and reduce the trade deficit.
- **Strategic Dual Leverage :** Agriculture isn't China's only leverage. It also controls critical **rare-earth elements**, essential for U.S. industries like defense, aerospace, and semiconductors. Combined, these dual pressures—agricultural and mineral—shape a compelling negotiating edge.

India Signs Trade Cooperation Pact with Zambia to Boost Cooperative Exports

In the News: India and Zambia signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** to promote cooperative trade alliances between their countries. Cooperation Minister **Amit Shah** highlighted that the agreement is aimed at strengthening India's cooperative export ecosystem, with support from Indian missions abroad to connect cooperatives with importers and provide vital market intelligence.

Key Points:

- **MoU Signing – July 18, 2025 :** India and Zambia formalized their cooperation in trade between their cooperative sectors through an MoU signed on July 18. This agreement establishes a structured framework for trade alliances between cooperative organizations of both nations.
- **Strengthening the Cooperative Export Ecosystem :** The Ministry of Cooperation is using India's diplomatic missions to provide **market information** to **National Cooperative Exports Ltd (NCEL)**, facilitating connections with potential importers in Zambia and other countries.

Global Expansion of NCEL Partnerships : In addition to the Zambia agreement, **NCEL** has executed MoUs with **Sinton Vantage Trading** in Senegal. **PT Sinton Surini Nusantara** in Indonesia. These partnerships are helping to expand India's cooperative exports into Africa and Southeast Asia.

US National Debt Hits Record \$37 Trillion Amid Rising Government Spending

In the News: The U.S. Treasury Department reported that the gross national debt has surpassed \$37 trillion, setting a new all-time high. This figure was previously projected to be reached only after the year 2030, but pandemic-driven spending and new tax-legislation have accelerated the timeline.

Key Points:

- **Milestone Reached Early:** The national debt of over \$37 trillion was achieved years ahead of earlier forecasts, which had anticipated crossing this threshold after fiscal year 2030.
- **Rapid Accumulation Rate:** The U.S. is adding approximately \$1 trillion every five months to its national debt—double the pace observed over the past 25 years.

- **Drivers of the Surge:**
 - Pandemic-related stimulus and relief packages spanning multiple years under both Trump and Biden administrations contributed heavily to the spike.
 - A recently enacted Republican-sponsored tax cut and spending package is expected to add \$4.1 trillion more to the debt over the next decade.
- **Economic Implications:** Rising debt levels are placing greater pressure on taxpayers, and increasing interest payments may crowd out public investment and elevate borrowing costs for households. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) warns of broader socioeconomic impacts—more expensive loans, lower wages, and higher consumer prices.

Negotiations for India-Oman CEPA Concluded

In the News: Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada informed Parliament that negotiations for the India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) have been successfully concluded. The CEPA aims to elevate trade and investment flows between the two nations.

Key Points:

- **Negotiation Timeline & Conclusion:** Discussions on the CEPA began in November 2023, and by March 2024, significant progress had already been made. The remaining issues were subsequently resolved, leading to the formal conclusion of negotiations in August 2025.
- **Scope & Strategic Significance of CEPA:** CEPA represents a comprehensive trade agreement encompassing goods, services, and broader economic collaboration such as trade facilitation, competition policy, and intellectual property rights. It goes beyond traditional FTAs in breadth and depth.
- **Longstanding Bilateral Ties:** India and Oman have maintained **diplomatic relations since 1955**, upgraded to a **strategic partnership in 2008**, grounded on mutual trust and deep people-to-people ties.
- **Trade Overview:** Oman is the third-largest export destination for India among Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. In the fiscal year 2024–25, bilateral trade reached approximately USD 10.61 billion. India's key exports include light oils, rice, machinery, and metals, while imports from Oman comprise crude oil, LNG, fertilizers, and chemicals.
- **Placement in India's FTA Strategy:** CEPA with Oman adds to India's expanding trade agreement network. In the past five years, India has signed major agreements including: **India-Mauritius CECPA (2021)**, **India-UAE CEPA** and **India-Australia ECTA (2022)**, **India-EFTA TEPA (2024)** and **India-UK CETA (2025)**

Putin-Trump Alaska Summit Concludes Without Ukraine Peace Deal

In the News: U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin met at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska. The summit, described by both leaders as “productive,” ended without any formal ceasefire agreement or peace deal to halt Russia's war in Ukraine.

Key Points:

- **No Ceasefire Agreement:** Despite nearly three hours of discussions, the summit failed to produce a ceasefire or any concrete agreement to end hostilities.
- **Vague Claims of Progress:** Both Trump and Putin claimed to have made progress on unspecified issues. Trump said, “We’ve made some headway” and cautioned, “There’s no deal until there’s a deal.”
- **Diplomatic Theatre, Not Substance:** The summit featured grand ceremonial gestures including a red-carpet welcome for Putin, a B-2 bomber flyover, and cordial interaction—but lacked tangible outcomes.
- **Putin's Public Relations Win:** The event served as a boost for Putin's international image. His appearance—including a ride in the presidential limo and praise for Trump's leadership—suggested a softening of Russia's diplomatic isolation.
- **Unresolved Core Issues:**
 - Putin emphasized that any resolution must address Russia's security concerns and opposition to NATO's eastward expansion.
 - The retention of occupied eastern Ukrainian territories, Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO and the EU, and Zelenskyy's position remained significant barriers.
- **Exclusion of Ukraine from the Table:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was not invited, prompting criticism that the summit sidelined Ukraine in decisions about its own conflict.

Neeraj Ghaywan's *Homebound* Wins Big at Indian Film Festival of Melbourne 2025

In the News: At the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM) awards night, Neeraj Ghaywan's drama *Homebound* emerged as the evening's biggest winner, clinching both **Best Film** and **Best Director**. The film, exploring themes of belonging, displacement, and the emotional complexities of returning home, will also serve as the festival's closing film on August 24.

Key Points:

- **Double Win for *Homebound*:** The film garnered both the Best Film and Best Director awards, highlighting Neeraj Ghaywan's compelling storytelling and vision.
- **Star Cast:** *Homebound* features Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jethwa, and Janhvi Kapoor, whose performances were central to its acclaim.
- **Closing Film Status:** It will close the IFFM 2025 on August 24, giving it a high-profile platform to conclude the festival.
- **Festival's Global Prestige:** IFFM 2025 marks the 16th edition of the festival, which is the largest Indian film festival held outside India.

Microsoft Tops TopBrand 2025 Global Brands List; NVIDIA and Apple Follow

In the News: At the 19th China Brand Festival held in Shenzhen from August 7–11, the TopBrand Union unveiled its 2025 "Top 500 Global Brands" ranking. Microsoft claimed the top spot with a brand value of **USD 1,062.505 billion (approx. \$1.06 trillion)**, followed closely by **NVIDIA** at **USD 1,046.760 billion** and **Apple** in third place with **USD 997.685 billion**.

Key Points:

- **Top 3 Brand Values:**
 - **Microsoft:** USD 1,062.505 billion
 - **NVIDIA:** USD 1,046.760 billion
 - **Apple:** USD 997.685 billion
- **Broader Top 10:** Rounding out the list from fourth to tenth were Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Saudi Aramco, Walmart, Meta (Facebook), Berkshire Hathaway, and Broadcom.
- **Chinese Representation:** **PetroChina** secured the 14th spot, making it the highest-valued Chinese brand on the list.
- **Representation Gap Highlighted:** Dr. Wang Yong, Chairman of TopBrand Union and President of the China Brand Festival, pointed out that while China had almost as many companies as the U.S. in the "Fortune 2025 Global 500," its presence in the TopBrand ranking was less than half that of the U.S.—highlighting a significant gap between economic scale and global brand influence.
- **About TopBrand Union:** Now in its fourth year, the "Top 500 Global Brands" list is published by TopBrand Union—a boutique branding consultancy that focuses on bridging China and the global market, offering expertise in brand strategy, events, research, and marketing.

SCIENCE AND TECH

ISRO Space Analog Mission 'HOPE'

In the News: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched the **HOPE (Himalayan Outpost for Planetary Exploration)** analog mission in **Tso Kar Valley, Ladakh**. This ground-based simulation environment replicates Mars- and Moon-like conditions to advance India's human spaceflight preparedness.

Key Points:

- **Mission Goal & Scope:** HOPE is part of ISRO's **Indian Human Spaceflight Programme**, designed to simulate extraterrestrial environments and evaluate human health, operational protocols, and space technologies in a terrestrial analog setting.
- **Location & Timings:** The mission runs from **August 1 to 10, 2025**, in **Tso Kar Valley**—a high-altitude, Mars-like terrain featuring low air pressure, intense UV radiation, saline permafrost, and extreme cold (ambient temperatures ranging roughly from -10 °C to 15 °C).
- **Habitat Configuration:** The analog habitat includes:
 - An **8-metre-diameter crew living module**

- A **5-metre-diameter utility module**, both interconnected for seamless workflow and designed to mimic constraints of planetary habitats.
- **Experiment Focus Areas:**
 - **Physical & Mental Health:** Monitoring epigenetic, genomic, physiological, and psychological responses of two analog crew members during isolation.
 - **Systems & Protocols:** Validating health-monitoring systems, planetary operations, microbial collection, emergency responses, and communication efficacy under simulated extraterrestrial conditions.
- **Institutional Collaboration:** Led by **ISRO's Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC)**, the mission involves partnerships with:
 - **Research Institutions:** IIST & RGCN (Thiruvananthapuram), IIT Hyderabad, IIT Bombay, Institute of Aerospace Medicine (Bengaluru)
 - **Industry Partner:** A Bengaluru-based space-tech company (Protoplanet) developed the habitat modules.
- **Strategic Significance:**
 - **Rehearsal for Human Missions:** HOPE acts as a critical rehearsal for ISRO's upcoming **Gaganyaan** mission and long-term plans for **lunar and interplanetary crewed exploration**.
 - **Boosts Readiness & Indigenous Capability:** The mission generates valuable data on human adaptability, supports development of life-support systems, and underscores public-private-academic collaboration in planetary analogue research.

Rhisotope Project

In the News: In 2025, a South African university, in collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), launched the innovative Rhisotope Project to combat rhino poaching by injecting rhino horns with radioactive isotopes. This groundbreaking initiative aims to make rhino horns detectable by radiation monitors at borders and ports worldwide, helping to disrupt illegal trafficking and protect the endangered rhino population.

Key Points:

- **Campaign Launch:** The Rhisotope Project officially reached operational status in 2025 after six years of research. Led by the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University) and supported technically and financially by the IAEA, it is a world-first effort to curb rhino poaching through science and technology.
- **Innovative Method:** The project involves injecting a safe, low-level radioactive isotope into rhino horns. This isotope does not harm the rhinos but makes the horns detectable by radiation portal monitors (RPMs) already installed at airports, seaports, and border crossings globally.
- **Poaching Crisis Context:** South Africa hosts the largest rhino population globally but suffers heavily from poaching, with over 400 rhinos killed annually since 2021 and more than 10,000 lost in the last decade. Rhino horns are highly sought after in illegal markets, especially in parts of Asia.
- **Detection and Enforcement:** Radiation detectors, originally used to detect nuclear and radioactive materials, can now identify rhino horns even if concealed inside large shipping containers. This increases the chances of intercepting smuggled horns and deterring traffickers.
- **Pilot and Safety Testing:** Initial pilot studies involved injecting 20 rhinos and confirmed the procedure's safety for animals through blood tests and veterinary examinations. The technology demonstrated effective detection in simulated transport scenarios.
- **Operational Scale and Vision:** The project is fully operational from mid-2025, urging all rhino owners, NGOs, and conservation authorities to treat their rhinos with the radioactive isotope. The goal is to deploy the technology at scale to safeguard Africa's iconic and endangered rhino species.
- **Collaboration and Partners:** Key partners include the University of the Witwatersrand, IAEA, Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa, Limpopo Rhino Orphanage, and UNESCO Waterberg Biosphere, which serves as the official launch site.

India's First Animal Stem Cell BioBank Inaugurated at NIAB, Hyderabad by Dr. Jitendra Singh

In the News: Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurated India's first-of-its-kind Animal Stem Cell BioBank and Laboratory at the National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB), Hyderabad. The state-of-the-art facility aims to revolutionize veterinary medicine, regenerative therapies, and livestock health, significantly advancing India's biotechnology and animal health sectors.

Key Points:

- **Campaign Launch:** Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurated the Animal Stem Cell BioBank and Laboratory at NIAB Hyderabad, a premier institute under the Department of Biotechnology's Biotechnology Research Innovation Council (BRIC).
- **Facility Details:** Spread over 9,300 sq ft with an investment of ₹1.85 crore, the BioBank includes advanced infrastructure such as a stem cell culture unit, 3D bioprinter for tissue engineering, bacterial culture lab, cryostorage units, autoclave rooms, high biosafety standards, advanced air handling systems, and uninterrupted power supply.
- **Focus and Applications:** The facility focuses on regenerative medicine, cellular therapies for livestock, disease modeling, reproductive biotechnology, and tissue engineering. It supports veterinary clinics, research institutions, and biomanufacturing of animal cell-based products.
- **National Biopharma Mission Support:** The BioBank expansion is planned under the National Biopharma Mission (NBM), which promotes biotechnology innovation and biobanking of animal stem cells and derivatives.
- **Associated Developments:** Alongside, Dr. Singh laid the foundation for a new hostel block and residential quarters costing ₹19.98 crore to support researchers and staff at NIAB.
- **Veterinary Innovations Launched:** Five breakthrough veterinary diagnostic technologies were introduced, including kits for early detection of Brucellosis, Mastitis, Toxoplasmosis, Japanese Encephalitis, and an Antimicrobial Sensitivity Testing device promoting responsible antibiotic use.
- **Impact:** These innovations align with the 'One Health' approach, aiming to improve animal health, increase livestock productivity, reduce import dependence, and enhance rural livelihoods. The BioBank marks a significant leap towards indigenous veterinary biotech capabilities in India.

ECONOMY

India's Retail Inflation Drops to 8-Year Low of 1.55% in July 2025

In the News: India's retail inflation dropped sharply to an eight-year low of 1.55% in July 2025, marking the lowest annual inflation rate since June 2017. This significant easing of inflation is a relief for consumers and reflects broad-based cooling in prices across essential goods and services.

Key Points:

- **Inflation Decline:** Retail inflation for July 2025 fell to 1.55%, down from 2.10% in June, marking a 55 basis point drop and the lowest since June 2017. This is the first time since January 2019 that inflation has fallen below 2%.
- **Drivers of the Decline:** The moderation is largely driven by falling food prices, with food inflation in negative territory at -1.76%. Major contributors to this decline include significant price reductions in pulses, vegetables, cereals, eggs, sugar and confectionery items. Prices for transportation and communication services also decreased.
- **Regional Impact:** Rural areas saw headline inflation ease to 1.18% from 1.72% in June, with food inflation dropping to -1.74%. In urban areas, headline inflation moderated to 2.05% from 2.56%, and food inflation declined to -1.90%.
- **Economic Outlook:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has noted this benign inflation outlook, which may provide room for further monetary easing. The RBI left interest rates unchanged recently but a further rate cut is possible as inflation remains well below the target band of 2-6%.
- **Consumer Impact:** This low inflation supports improved purchasing power, especially benefiting lower and middle-income households who are most impacted by price volatility. It signals a more comfortable consumer environment after years of higher inflation.

Simplified Two-Tier GST System Proposed

In the News: The Indian government unveiled plans for a sweeping Goods and Services Tax (GST) reform, dubbed GST 2.0. Speaking on Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi described it as a "Diwali gift" promising lower taxes and streamlined compliance. The Finance Ministry has formally proposed a simplified **two-slab GST structure**, moving away from the current multi-tier system, with rollout targeted by **Diwali 2025**.

Key Points:

- **New Tax Slabs Proposed:**
 - **5%:** Targeted at essential goods—daily-use, aspirational, and common-man items.
 - **18%:** Intended for most other goods and services.
 - A **special 40% rate** is earmarked for a limited subset of **sin and luxury goods** like tobacco and pan masala.

- **Broad Redistribution of Goods:** Approximately **99%** of items currently in the **12% bracket** would move to **5%**. Around **90%** of goods in the **28% bracket** would shift to **18%**. Only about **5–7 items** may fall under the 40% category.
- **GST 2.0—Beyond Rate Rationalisation:** This reform isn't solely about rates. It targets deep-rooted issues such as classification disputes, inverted duty structures, procedural inefficiencies, and inter-agency misalignment to stabilize and simplify the system.
- **Rationale & Expected Benefits:** Aims to **reduce compliance burdens** and offer predictability to businesses. Supports Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and boosts consumer affordability. Expected to **stimulate economic activity** and strengthen demand amid global trade pressures.
- **Implementation Timeline:** Proposal has been forwarded to the **Group of Ministers (GoM)** and will be deliberated at upcoming **GST Council meetings**. Confirmation and rollout are anticipated **by Diwali 2025**.

AWARDS

Equator Prize 2025

In the News: The Bibi Fatima Women's Self-Help Group (SHG) from Teertha village in Karnataka's Dharwad district won the prestigious Equator Prize 2025, awarded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This award recognizes community-led nature-based solutions for sustainable development and climate resilience, highlighting women and youth leadership in climate action.

Key Points:

- **Equator Prize 2025:** The Equator Prize is an annual UNDP award honoring Indigenous Peoples and local communities worldwide for their innovative efforts in biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihoods, and climate resilience. The 2025 theme focused on "Women and Youth Leadership for Nature-Based Climate Action." Winners were selected from over 700 nominations across 103 countries.
- **Bibi Fatima Women's SHG Achievements:** Formed in 2018 by 15 women, the group now supports over 5,000 farmers across 30 villages. They promote millet-based mixed cropping on rainfed farms using eco-friendly natural farming methods. The SHG manages community seed banks conserving over 250 indigenous varieties and operates a solar-powered millet processing unit producing value-added products like rotis and vermicelli. Their initiatives enhance food security, biodiversity conservation, and women's economic empowerment.
- **Collaborations and Support:** The SHG partners with organizations such as Sahaja Samruddha, Indian Institute of Millets Research, CROPS4HD, and Selco Foundation for solar power solutions. It also works with Devadhanya Farmer Producer Company to promote rural agribusinesses, strengthening climate-resilient farming and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Global Significance:** The Bibi Fatima SHG is the only Indian winner among ten global recipients from countries like Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania, Papua New Guinea, and Ecuador. Collectively, these winners exemplify nature-based solutions that protect ecosystems, support food sovereignty, and promote inclusive green economies with a focus on women and youth leadership.
- **Award Benefits:** Each winner receives USD 10,000, global recognition, and the opportunity to participate in major UN events such as the UN General Assembly and the UN Climate Change Conference (COP30).

National Anubhav Awards 2025: Celebrating a Decade of Honouring Retired Employees' Contributions

In the News: The Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare hosted the National Anubhav Awards 2025 in New Delhi, marking the 10th anniversary of the "Anubhav" initiative. The awards honor retired government employees who have shared outstanding written accounts of their work experience, contributing to institutional memory and inspiring serving officers.

Key Points:

- **Award Ceremony:** The National Anubhav Awards were presented by Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, Dr. Jitendra Singh. This year marks a decade since the launch of the Anubhav platform in 2015 by the Government of India.
- **Purpose of the Initiative:** The "Anubhav" portal was created to encourage retiring government employees to document their experiences, achievements, and lessons learned, thereby creating a repository of knowledge for future governance improvements.
- **2025 Award Highlights:**

- Awards were given to civil servants from various ministries and departments for their exceptional write-ups on governance challenges, innovations, and key achievements during service.
- The selection criteria included originality, clarity, institutional usefulness, and relevance for future policy or procedural improvements.
- **Focus on Knowledge Sharing:** Over 15,000 write-ups have been uploaded to the Anubhav portal in the past decade, serving as a rich archive of institutional best practices and real-life case studies for policymakers and administrators.
- **Special 10-Year Milestone Activities:** This year's celebration included panel discussions with past awardees, showcasing how their documented experiences have been implemented in current government processes. A souvenir publication highlighting a decade of Anubhav contributions was released.
- **Encouraging a Culture of Documentation:** Ministries have been encouraged to integrate Anubhav contributions into departmental training modules to ensure that the insights from retired officials serve as a guide for ongoing and future projects.

SPORTS

Himalayan Kingfisher Unveiled as Mascot for Khelo India Water Sports Festival 2025

In the News: The Himalayan Kingfisher was officially unveiled as the mascot for the inaugural Khelo India Water Sports Festival (KIWSF), set to be held from August 21 to 23 at Dal Lake, Srinagar. The mascot and the event logo were revealed by Jammu & Kashmir's Minister for Youth Services and Sports, Satish Sharma, along with MLA Tanvir Sadiq, in collaboration with the Sports Authority of India and the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

Key Points:

- **Mascot Identity & Symbolism:** The mascot, the Himalayan Kingfisher, was selected for its vibrant appearance and symbolic qualities. With its bold orange and blue hues, the bird embodies energy, tranquillity, and the natural beauty of Kashmir. It represents qualities of being swift, fearless, and at home on the water—befitting the spirit of water sports. Beyond its visual appeal, the mascot serves as an ambassador promoting eco-friendly sports, tourism, and youth engagement across the nation.
- **Logo Highlights:** The KIWSF logo visually captures Kashmir's essence with a Shikara gliding on Dal Lake, framed by snow-capped mountains and pine trees. This imagery, mirrored in the water's reflection, symbolizes the region's serene beauty. The iconic Khelo India colours unify themes of tradition, nature, and athletic energy.
- **Event Context:** Taking place at Dal Lake (August 21–23, 2025), this is the first-ever Khelo India Water Sports Festival. The festival features medal events in rowing, canoeing, and kayaking, and demonstration events including water skiing, a Shikara race, and a dragon boat race. Over 400 athletes from 36 states and Union Territories are expected to participate.
- **Significance for Jammu & Kashmir:** For J&K, this marks the second major Khelo India event, following the Khelo India Winter Games in Gulmarg in March 2025. MLS Tanvir Sadiq remarked that while Gulmarg is now established as the country's winter games capital, Dal Lake will emerge as the water sports hub of India.

India Officially Bids to Host 2030 Commonwealth Games: IOA Approval Confirmed

In the News: The Indian Olympic Association (IOA), during a Special General Meeting (SGM), formally approved India's bid to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games. The final bid is to be submitted by August 31, 2025. Key candidate cities include Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Bhubaneswar. The announcement reflects India's sporting ambitions and infrastructure readiness to host a world-class multi-sport event.

Key Points:

- **IOA's Formal Approval:** The IOA officially ratified the bid during its Executive Committee meeting and SGM, signalling unanimous support across national sports federations.
- **Cities in Consideration:** The bid is anchored in **Ahmedabad**, with **Delhi** and **Bhubaneswar** also under consideration as potential hosts.
- **Robust Infrastructure Strategy:** Ahmedabad is establishing a comprehensive sports ecosystem—led by the **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave**, spanning 236 acres—that includes: Narendra Modi Stadium, A football stadium, Indoor arena, Aquatics center, Athlete village and Supporting grassroots and hospitality infrastructure

- **Bid Objectives & Vision:** The bid positions the Games as a stepping stone toward hosting the **2036 Olympics**, demonstrating India's long-term sports diplomacy and global event organization goals. A recent delegation from Commonwealth Sport assessed infrastructure, sustainability, accommodations, gender-balance frameworks, and alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Sports Programme Strategy:** India plans to reintroduce sports omitted from the upcoming 2026 Games (e.g., shooting, wrestling, badminton, women's cricket, hockey, squash, archery, table tennis), emphasizing medal potential and cultural relevance.

Real Madrid Named World's Most Valuable Football Club in 2025

In the News: In 2025, Real Madrid was officially recognized as the world's most valuable football club—securing the top spot in both Forbes' valuations and Brand Finance rankings.

Key Points

Forbes Valuation:

- **Top Position Maintained:** Forbes named Real Madrid as the most valuable football club globally for the **fourth consecutive year**, with an impressive value of **US\$6.75 billion**.
- **Revenue Milestone:** The club became the **first ever football team** to generate over **US\$1 billion in annual revenue**, achieving **US\$1.13 billion** during the 2023–24 season.
- **Next in Line:** Manchester United followed in second place at **US\$6.6 billion**, with Barcelona third at **US\$5.65 billion**.

Brand Finance Ranking:

- **Most Valuable Brand:** For the **second year in a row**, Real Madrid topped Brand Finance's "Football 50-2025" as the world's **most valuable football club brand**, with a brand value rising **14% to €1.921 billion**.
- **Brand Strength:** The club also held the title of the **strongest football brand** for the **fourth successive year**, earning a score of **94.9/100** and the highest possible **AAA+ rating**.

Supporting Context:

- **Global Financial Leadership:** Real Madrid's financial supremacy stems from **robust international fan engagement**, "record revenues achieved over two consecutive seasons," and a powerful brand foundation.
- **Commercial & Operational Edge:** The launch and redevelopment of the **Santiago Bernabéu Stadium** have significantly boosted matchday income and overall valuation.