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## IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

## NATIONAL

**First Private Railway Station of Uttar Pradesh: Gomti Nagar Station, Lucknow**

**In the News:** Indian Railways announced that **Gomti Nagar Railway Station** in **Lucknow** will become **Uttar Pradesh's first privately managed station**, and the **first such project in the North Eastern Railway zone**. This initiative is being rolled out under the **Integrated Station Facility Management System (ISFMS)**, with **private operators** now responsible for all passenger services except train operations, security, and ticketing.

**Key Points**

- **Management Mode:** Operates under a **hybrid model**: Indian Railways retains control over **train movement, security, and ticketing**
  - **Private consortiums** manage: cleanliness & waste, waiting & retiring rooms, toilets, catering, parking, vending, digital displays, and commercial leasing.
- **Contract & Revenue Share:** Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) will invite bidders and award 9-year operational licences, with an optional 3-year extension. RLDA retains 15% of license fees, 85% is remitted to Indian Railways.
- **Modern Amenities & Infrastructure Upgrades:** Station is already equipped with solar rooftop panels, 14 lifts, 13 escalators, and newly constructed commercial blocks, along with a 28-meter-wide concourse and a 458-meter flyover. Plans include airport-style lounge, branded food courts, retail zones, and enhanced crowd flow systems.
- **Pilot Project Within Smart Station Strategy:** Gomti Nagar and Chandigarh station are the first two pilot stations under ISFMS within Indian Railways to test privatization of station amenities. Gomti Nagar's status was officially recognized in the PIB Year-End Review 2024 as the "first phase of Gomti Nagar Station of North Eastern Railway" redeveloped under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

**PM Ekta Malls (Prime Minister's 'Unity Malls'): National Roll-Out for ODOP, GI & Handicrafts**

**In the News:** The Union Government (Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance), based on recommendations from DPIIT, approved 27 states for the construction of PM Ekta Malls—special retail outlets dedicated to One District One Product (ODOP), Geographical Indication (GI), and local handicraft merchandise, under Part VI of SASCI 2023-24. In the same fiscal, state-specific Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) were sanctioned with funding nearing ₹4,796 crore. A pooled budget of ₹5,000 crore has been earmarked, with states offered one mall allocation (UP gets three due to scale), and land to be provided by state governments at no or minimal cost.

**Key Points**

- **Scheme Launch & Objectives:** The PM Ekta Mall scheme was first unveiled in the **2023-24 Union Budget** to create unified retail spaces—preferably in state capitals, tourist or business hubs—for states and Union Territories to showcase ODOP and GI-tagged goods across a country-wide 'Unity Mall' network.
- **Budget & Approval Status:** A total budget of ₹5,000 crore was set aside in SASCI Part-VI; '27 states' DPRs were approved in FY 2023-24, with nearly ₹4,796 crore released for project initiation. States that have not yet commenced DPR finalisation include West Bengal, Delhi, J&K, Chandigarh, Ladakh, Puducherry and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- **State-wise Focus & Major Allocations**
  - Uttar Pradesh (due to its craft diversity and scale) was allocated the maximum of ₹370.25 crore to build three Ekta Malls at Agra, Jaipur and Varanasi.
  - Major allocations also went to Madhya Pradesh (₹284 crore, Ujjain), Assam (₹226 crore, Guwahati), Tamil Nadu (₹223 crore, Chennai), Bihar (₹212.69 crore, Patna), Gujarat and Telangana (₹202 crore each).
- **Operational Model:** Under SASCI guidance, states must provide land (free or state-borne cost) and build as per DPR standards. Malls will be implemented on a first-come, first-serve basis, designed to host dedicated sections for each State/UT under a single branding model with robust connectivity, visibility, and retail infrastructure.
- **Long-term Vision:** These malls aim to become permanent marketplaces for local artisans and micro-enterprises, providing premium retail presence and supply-chain visibility in major urban centres, promoting direct artisan-to-consumer linkages along the lines of global handicraft showrooms.

### India Achieves 20% Ethanol Blending in Petrol

**In the News:** Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri announced that India had reached 20% ethanol blending (E20) in petrol—achieving this milestone five years ahead of the original 2030 deadline. The breakthrough was officially attained during Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2024-25, marking a major chapter in India's energy transition and rural advancement.

#### Key Highlights

- **Accelerated Progress:** Ethanol blending steadily increased: 10% by June 2022, 12.06% in ESY 2022-23, 14.60% in ESY 2023-24, and 17.98% by 28 Feb 2025, culminating in the 20% milestone in mid-2025.
- **Production Surge & Supply:** Ethanol supply grew from 38 crore litres (2013-14) to 661.1 crore litres by June 2025—a nearly 17× increase, sufficient to sustain full E20 blending.
- **Economic & Environmental Benefits** India saved approximately ₹1.36 lakh crore in foreign exchange by substituting fossil fuels. Distilleries earned ₹1.96 lakh crore; farmers received ₹1.18 lakh crore boosting rural incomes and sugarcane-supported ethanol value chain. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were reduced by about 698 lakh tonnes, aiding climate mitigation goals.
- **Policy Measures Driving Change:** In 2022, the National Policy on Biofuels accelerated the E20 target to ESY 2025-26. Measures included interest subvention schemes, expanding feedstocks (grains, sugarcane, maize, agricultural residue), reduced GST (5%) on ethanol, Long-Term Offtake Agreements with Dedicated Ethanol Plants (DEPs), and introduction of flex-fuel vehicle norms.
- **Roadmap & Tech Readiness:** Engine compatibility for E20 (with minor hardware or tuning adjustments) was validated; SIAM affirmed minimal performance or wear issues. A public roadmap (2020–25) outlined strategic steps: feedstock diversification, capacity expansion to 1,700 crore litre/year, and logistics efficiencies.

### First-Ever BIMSTEC Traditional Music Festival Begins in New Delhi

**In the News:** The inaugural BIMSTEC Traditional Music Festival, titled “**SaptaSur: Seven Nations, One Melody**”, was held at **Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi**. External Affairs Minister **Dr. S Jaishankar** inaugurated the event, highlighting music's role as a cultural bridge and a means to express heritage and identity. Organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), artists from **India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand** performed traditional music in celebration of regional unity and cultural diplomacy.

#### Key Points:

- **Festival Launch & Inauguration:** The first-ever BIMSTEC Traditional Music Festival—Sapta Sur: Seven Nations, One Melody—began on **August 4, 2025**, inaugurated by External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.
- **Participating Nations:** Artists from all seven BIMSTEC member states—**India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand**—showcased their traditional musical heritage at the event.
- **Cultural Diplomacy & Regional Unity:** Dr. Jaishankar emphasized the power of traditional music as both a cultural bridge and a vehicle for preserving identity, dignity, and mutual respect in uncertain global times.
- **India's Commitment Realized:** The festival fulfilled a promise made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the BIMSTEC Summit in Thailand (April 2025) to promote regional cultural cooperation through music, highlighting India's soft power and diplomatic outreach.
- **Organizing Body:** The event was arranged by the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)**, underlining India's cultural outreach as part of its foreign policy frameworks such as Neighbourhood First and Act East.
- **Context & Broader Impact: BIMSTEC Overview:** BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), formed in 1997 with headquarters in Dhaka, includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. It focuses on sectors ranging from trade and connectivity to culture and environment.
- **Policy Alignment:** This cultural initiative aligns with India's Act East and Neighbourhood First policies, positioning the country as a regional leader in the Indo-Pacific, and emphasizing culture as a soft-power tool in regional diplomacy.

### Sikkim Sabbatical Leave System

**In the News:** Sikkim officially became the **first state in India** to launch a formal **Sabbatical Leave Scheme** for government employees. The policy, initiated in **August 2023**, enables public servants in the state to take extended leave for diverse purposes while retaining job security and partial pay.

#### Key Points:

- **Scheme Launch & Timeline:** Introduced in **August 2023**, the Sabbatical Leave Scheme is formally recognized from **August 1, 2025**, making Sikkim the first Indian state to implement such a policy.
- **Eligibility & Duration:** **Regular employees** with at least **five years** of continuous service can avail sabbatical leave ranging from **365 to 1,080 days**. **Temporary employees** with a minimum of **six months** continuous service were included in the scheme through later expansion. **Pay & Job Security:** Employees receive **50% of their basic pay** during the sabbatical period, and their **seniority is preserved**. The government retains the right to recall an employee with **one month's notice** if needed.
- **Reasons for Leave:** The scheme permits sabbaticals for various purposes, including: pursuing higher education or skill development, launching entrepreneurial ventures, artistic or literary pursuits, personal or health-related reasons, family obligations, relocation with spouse, wellness retreats, and more.
- **Approval & Decentralized Authority:** In **April 2025**, Sikkim delegated approval authority: **Heads of Departments (HoDs)** can now approve sabbatical leave for **Group C and D employees**, including eligible temporary staff. **Group A and B employees** must still seek approval from the **Secretary of the Personnel Department**.
- **Impact & Uptake:** Since launch, **hundreds of government employees** in Sikkim have availed this opportunity to pursue personal growth—such as education or entrepreneurial projects—making it a model for employee-centric governance.

### Single Window System for State DGP Appointments

**In the News:** The Union Government formally introduced a **Single Window System (SWS)** to standardize and streamline the appointment of **State Director Generals of Police (DGPs)** or **Heads of Police Force (HoPF)** across India.

#### Key Points:

- **Policy Launch & Effective Date:** The Single Window System became operational from **April 22, 2025**, requiring all states to follow the standardized format for proposals and candidate panels submitted for selecting State DGPs.
- **Purpose & Structure:** SWS includes a **checklist and standardized formats** to streamline state submissions and support transparency. It ensures states forward eligible candidate names in a uniform manner to central authorities.
- **Alignment with Supreme Court Guidelines:** The system reinforces the Supreme Court directives from the **Prakash Singh (2006)** judgment, which mandate Consultation with the **Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)**. Preparation of a **panel of three eligible senior IPS officers**. A **minimum tenure of two years** for appointed DGPs. Eligibility restricted to officers with **30 years of service and rank of Additional DGP or equivalent**.
- **Capsulizing Compliance & Uniformity:** SWS ensures consistent application of the Supreme Court's merit-based, transparent standards across all states, reducing arbitrariness or ad-hocism in DGP selections.
- **Broader Impact on Police Reforms:** The move addresses long-standing issues of interim or acting appointments that bypass due process, which have often attracted legal scrutiny. Several High Court PILs—including from Tamil Nadu—have urged adherence to the empanelment guidelines in light of impending retirements and flaws in state-level selection mechanisms.

### ICRISAT Launches AI-Powered Climate Advisory to Support Small Farmers

**In the News:** The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), in partnership with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and supported under India's **Monsoon Mission III**, officially launched the **AI-powered Context-Specific Agromet Advisory Services for Climate-Resilient Agriculture at Scale**, aimed at equipping smallholder farmers with hyper-local, personalized climate and weather advisories.

#### Key Points:

- **Initiative Launch:** The project was unveiled during a two-day inception workshop at ICRISAT's Hyderabad headquarters on **July 29–30, 2025**. **Objective & Support:** Under **Monsoon Mission III**, this initiative aims to deliver hyper-local actionable weather and climate insights via AI/ML to support decision-making such as sowing, irrigation, pest control, etc.
- **Core Technology – iSAT:** Central to the project is the upgraded **Intelligent Systems Advisory Tool (iSAT)**—originally piloted during Monsoon Mission II—which now incorporates AI-enhanced crop models, real-time IMD forecasts, soil and socio-economic inputs to generate personalized advisories.
- **Delivery Channels:** Advisories will reach farmers via a user-friendly digital ecosystem—an **AI-powered WhatsApp bot (in regional languages)**, plus IVRS, mobile apps, and village resource centers to bridge the last-mile digital divide.
- **Pilot Implementation:** The pilot rollout will begin in **Maharashtra**, using ICAR's Agro-Meteorological Field Units (AMFUs) to serve small land-holding farmers; findings will inform scale-up across India and potentially in the Global South.

- **Consortium of Partners:** The initiative brings together ICRISAT, ICAR-CRIDA, ILRI, IITM, IMD, IIT Ropar, CSIO, and IISc under a multi-institutional consortium to develop the advisory system.

### FIFA and AIFF Launch India's First FIFA Talent Academy for Girls

**In the News:** India's first FIFA Talent Academy for girls was officially launched in **Hyderabad**—a collaboration between the **All India Football Federation (AIFF)**, **FIFA**, and the **Government of Telangana**—under FIFA's global **Talent Development Scheme (TDS)**.

#### Key Points:

- **Landmark Launch:** The academy—India's first residential FIFA Talent Academy for girls—was inaugurated during the **first Telangana Sports Conclave** at Hyderabad International Convention Centre, following the MoU signing between AIFF and the Telangana government on **August 2–3, 2025**.
- **Program Capacity and Structure:** It will accommodate **60 elite players—30 girls (U16) and 30 boys (U14)**—with **10 players from Telangana** in each group. Despite being co-located, this is **India's first girls-only FIFA Talent Academy**.
- **Location & Facilities:** Based at the **Gachibowli Stadium Complex, Hyderabad**, the academy offers year-long high-performance training, residential housing, schooling, medical care, nutrition plans, and mental wellness support.
- **Funding Model:** The initiative costs approximately **₹7.23 crore annually**—with **FIFA funding ₹65 lakh** (covering the head coach's salary and stay), **AIFF funding ~₹61 lakh** for support staff, and the **Telangana government covering ₹5.97 crore per year**.
- **Governance & Oversight:** The **AIFF** will lead on operations, scouting, training curriculum, and alignment with FIFA. The **Sports Authority of Telangana** will handle infrastructure, logistics, education, and player welfare.
- **Strategic Impact:** The academy symbolizes a shift toward **equitable talent development**, especially empowering young girls. AIFF President **Kalyan Chaubey** called it "a defining moment" for inclusive football in India. The goal includes nurturing players for India's U17 men's and women's FIFA World Cup aspirations and aligning with AIFF's **Vision 2047** and Telangana's **Sports Policy 2025**.
- **Global Alignment:** As part of FIFA's **Talent Development Scheme**, this academy is one of the few globally dedicated to girls, reinforcing India's commitment to structured grassroots growth in women's football.

### PM Modi's 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' Sets Guinness World Record with 3.53 Crore Registrations

**In the News:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship initiative **Pariksha Pe Charcha (PPC) 2025**, hosted on the **MyGov** platform, earned the **Guinness World Record** for the "**Most people registered on a Citizen Engagement Platform in one month**"—with a staggering **3.53 crore valid registrations** during the eighth edition of the programme.

#### Key Points:

- **Record Achievement:** PPC 2025 recorded **3.53 crore valid registrations** on MyGov within a single month, setting a new Guinness World Record.
- **Official Recognition Ceremony:** The Guinness World Record certificate was formally presented in New Delhi on **August 4, 2025**, in the presence of Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Jitin Prasada, MyGov CEO Nand Kumar, Secretary Sanjay Kumar, and other senior officials, with adjudication by Rishi Nath of Guinness World Records.
- **Mass Viewership:** The 8th edition of PPC reached over **21 crore viewers across all media platforms** in 2025, underlining its broad appeal and engagement.
- **Purpose & Format:** Since its inception in **2018**, PPC has been a unique engagement platform led by PM Modi, where he interacts directly with students, parents, and teachers to address academic stress, time management, digital distractions, mindfulness, and emotional resilience in alignment with **NEP 2020**.
- **Leadership Commentary:** **Dharmendra Pradhan** highlighted how PPC refashions exam-related anxiety into a positive, holistic learning festival, and described the record as proof of India's collective commitment to inclusive education and Viksit Bharat vision. **Ashwini Vaishnaw** emphasized the strong public trust in PPC as a platform of well-being and stress-free learning. **Jitin Prasada** lauded MyGov for enabling digital participation and participatory governance at scale.

### NITI Aayog Launches Report on Unlocking a \$200 Billion Opportunity in Electric Vehicles

**In the News:** NITI Aayog officially unveiled its flagship report titled "**Unlocking a \$200 Billion Opportunity: Electric Vehicles in India**" at **Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi**. The launch was led by **Rajiv Gauba (Member, NITI Aayog)** in the presence of **B.V.R.**

Subrahmanyam (CEO, NITI Aayog), Kamran Rizvi (Secretary, Ministry of Heavy Industries), O.P. Agarwal (Distinguished Fellow, NITI Aayog) and Sudhendu Sinha (Programme Director – E-Mobility).

**Key Points:**

- **Scope & Timing:** The report was launched on August 4, 2025, serving as a strategic blueprint to accelerate India's EV transition.
- **Market Growth Snapshot:** EV sales in India jumped from **50,000 in 2016 to 2.08 million in 2024**, while global sales soared from 918,000 to **18.78 million** over the same period. India's EV penetration rose from about **20% of the global average in 2020 to over 40% by 2024**, reaching approximately **7.6% of total vehicle sales in 2024**.
- **Target & Vision:** India aims to achieve a **30% share of EVs in total vehicle sales by 2030**, unlocking a potential **\$200 billion EV market**.
- **Blueprint Highlights:**
  - A call for a **time-bound National EV Policy** with clear targets and implementation timelines, supported by mandates and disincentives alongside existing incentives.
  - Focus on **high-impact segments** such as electric buses, trucks, two- and three-wheelers, and urban freight to maximize emissions reductions and cost-effectiveness.
  - Proposals for **blended finance mechanisms** to lower capital costs for commercial EVs, coupled with priority sector lending facilitations.
  - Advocacy for firm **Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) mandates**, gradually reducing incentives for internal combustion engine vehicles, especially in urban zones.
  - Infrastructure planning centered on **hotspot-based charging networks** in urban centers, freight corridors, and logistic hubs; includes lowering GST on public charging services.
  - Emphasis on enhancing **R&D in battery tech**, domestic manufacturing and introducing **battery passports** for life-cycle tracking, resale and recycling

**Agnishodh and Project SAMBHAV**

**In the News:** Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Upendra Dwivedi inaugurated "**Agnishodh**", the Indian Army Research Cell (IARC), at the IIT Madras campus. He also spotlighted **Project SAMBHAV (Secure Army Mobile Bharat Vision)** as a pivotal technology initiative for secure battlefield communication.

**Key Points:**

**Agnishodh**

- **Bridge from Lab to Field:** The Indian Army Research Cell (IARC), **Agnishodh**, is designed to convert academic innovations into practical defence technologies, aligning closely with operational needs.
- **Supports Army Transformation:** It forms a critical component of the Indian Army's **Five Pillars of Transformation**, with a focus on Technology Absorption, Structural Change, Human Resource Development, and tri-service cohesion.
- **Core Focus Areas:** The cell emphasizes cutting-edge domains such as **Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, Cybersecurity, Wireless Communication, and Unmanned Systems**, while also upskilling personnel in these advanced fields.

**Project SAMBHAV (Secure Army Mobile Bharat Vision)**

- **Secure 5G Ecosystem:** SAMBHAV is a **secure, 5G-based, network-agnostic mobile communication system** enabling encrypted, on-the-move connectivity—even in remote or high-risk areas.
- **Enhanced Field Communication:** It strengthens battlefield communication by making it faster, more secure, and more reliable, mitigating risks associated with conventional apps and public networks.

**Punjab Becomes First State to Empanel Sign Language Experts Under Juvenile Justice Act**

**In the News:** Punjab became the **first state in India** to formally empanel **sign language interpreters, translators, and special educators** under the **Juvenile Justice Act, 2015**, marking a landmark step toward inclusive justice for children with hearing and speech impairments.

**Key Points:**

- **Historic Initiative:** Under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and announced by Dr Baljit Kaur, Minister for Social Security, Women and Child Development, Punjab is pioneering this move to ensure accessible justice for children with special needs.
- **Support in Legal and Daily Settings:** These professionals will be deployed district-wise to assist children during court proceedings and other formal interactions, effectively eliminating communication barriers.
- **Alignment with POCSO Act:** The initiative also ties into the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012**, reinforcing legal safeguards for vulnerable children .
- **District-Wise Deployment & Compensation:** The empanelled experts will be deployed across districts and will receive compensation in accordance with existing legal provisions.
- **Inclusive Governance Practice:** Punjab has previously made assembly proceedings more accessible by broadcasting legislative sessions in sign language, demonstrating its ongoing commitment to inclusivity.
- **Building an Inclusive Society:** The move is part of the state government's broader vision to ensure every child, regardless of ability, feels heard, understood, and protected.

### Chhattisgarh Emerges as Major Ni-Cu-PGE Mineral Belt with Breakthrough Discovery in Mahasamund

**In the News:** The Geological Survey of India (GSI) announced a major breakthrough with the discovery of significant **Nickel (Ni), Copper (Cu), and Platinum Group Elements (PGE)** deposits in the **Mahasamund district** of Chhattisgarh. This finding positions Chhattisgarh as a prominent mineral belt in India for strategic and critical metals.

#### Key Points:

- **Discovery Announcement:** The GSI confirmed the presence of Ni-Cu-PGE mineralization in ultramafic rocks near the **Amapara-Pipariya region** of Mahasamund district, marking one of the most promising mineral finds in central India
- **Strategic Significance:** The discovery is critical for India's energy transition and electric vehicle goals, as nickel and PGEs are key components in **battery technologies and hydrogen fuel cells**.
- **Resource Potential:** Preliminary studies suggest high concentrations of nickel sulphide and associated PGEs, making it a prospective site for commercial mining and exploration
- **Boost to Domestic Supply:** This find aligns with India's goal of reducing import dependence on critical minerals, particularly in the wake of global supply chain disruptions.
- **Geological Mapping:** The mineralization was identified through detailed aerogeophysical surveys and ground mapping under GSI's National Mineral Exploration Policy.
- **Future Exploration Plans:** The Centre and state government will soon invite private sector participation for further exploration under auction-based licensing, with a focus on sustainable mining practices.

### Merchant Shipping Bill – Modernising India's Maritime Law

**In the News:** The Lok Sabha passed the **Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024**, aimed at overhauling India's century-old maritime legal framework stemming from the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958. This bill, enacted alongside the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025, marks a major step toward aligning India's maritime legislation with global standards and modern operational needs.

#### Key Points:

- **Comprehensive Legal Overhaul:** The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 repeals the outdated 1958 Act and consolidates maritime governance under a modern, future-forward structure consisting of **16 Parts and 325 clauses**.
- **Alignment with International Conventions:** The Bill updates India's legislation to reflect compliance with key IMO conventions, such as MARPOL (marine pollution), SOLAS (safety), and the Wreck Removal Convention, thus enhancing maritime safety and environmental norms.
- **Expanded Legal Scope:** Definitions of "vessel" are broadened to include **mobile offshore drilling units, submersibles, and non-displacement crafts**. It also introduces **temporary registration mechanisms for vessels headed for recycling**, promoting shipbreaking at places like Alang.
- **Eased Ownership Regulations:** Ownership criteria are relaxed to accommodate vessels partly owned by Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs), with thresholds set by the central government. Foreign vessels chartered with intent to register in the future are also eligible for Indian registry.
- **Empowered Regulatory Authority:** The Bill renames and repositions the head of maritime oversight as the **Director-General of Maritime Administration**, with enhanced powers including the appointment of security bodies and better enforcement capabilities.

- **Emphasis on Seafarer Welfare & Safety:** Provisions are included to ensure seafarers' welfare—covering accommodations, healthcare, social security, and compensation—aligned with the Maritime Labour Convention. It also mandates stronger frameworks for accident reporting, wreck removal, and emergency response.
- **Strategic & Economic Implications:** The reform envisions India as a globally respected maritime jurisdiction, promoting Indian tonnage, green shipping initiatives, and investment in maritime trade and technology. Together with other bills, it supports ease of business and bolsters the “blue economy.”

### Why Maharashtra Govt wants film 'Khalid Ka Shivaji' put on hold

**In the News:** The Maharashtra government formally requested the Union Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and the CBFC to re-examine the certification of the Marathi film “Khalid Ka Shivaji” and halt its release amid a growing controversy over alleged historical distortions.

#### Key Points:

- **Historical Distortion Allegations:** Right-wing groups and historians have accused the film of distorting the legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj—claiming, among other things, that 35% of his army were Muslims and that a mosque existed on Raigad Fort, both of which have sparked outrage over perceived misrepresentation.
- **Impact on Public Sentiment and Law & Order:** Protesters disrupted CM Devendra Fadnavis's speech at the Maharashtra Film Awards, leading to concerns that the film's release could inflame public sentiments and cause civil unrest.
- **Government Intervention:** The Cultural Affairs Department sent a letter to the I&B Ministry seeking to suspend the film's release and direct the CBFC to re-examine its certification under Section 6(1) of the Cinematograph Act, citing the risk of violence.
- **Questions on Cannes Selection:** The film's selection for screening at the Cannes Film Festival has also come under scrutiny, prompting an inquiry into whether the nomination process involved any irregularities or mischief.
- **Central Response:** The I&B Ministry issued notices to the filmmakers, asking for clarifications and supporting documentation regarding the contentious content.

### DAC Greenlights Multi-Domain Capability Upgrades for Armed Forces

**In the News:** The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, approved **capital acquisition proposals worth ₹67,000 crore** aimed at enhancing multi-domain operational capabilities across the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force

#### Key Points:

- **Tri-Service Capability Expansion:** The DAC sanctioned advanced systems for the Army, Navy, and Air Force to bolster combat readiness, surveillance, and strategic flexibility.
- **Army Upgrades:** Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) was granted for procuring **thermal imager-based driver night-sights** for BMP infantry vehicles, enhancing night-time mobility and situational awareness.
- **Air Force Enhancements:** Capital acquisitions include **mountain radars** for improved surveillance over mountainous borders and upgrades to the **SPYDER/SAKSHAM air defence system**, integrating it with the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS). Also cleared were maintenance contracts for C-17, C-130J fleets and the S-400 air defence missile system.
- **Naval Advances:** The Navy will procure **Compact Autonomous Surface Craft** to strengthen anti-submarine warfare (ASW), upgrade **BrahMos fire control systems and launchers**, and modernize the **BARAK-1 point-defence missile system**.
- **Persistent Surveillance:** Approval was granted for Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) **Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPAs)** across the three services, enhancing 24x7 surveillance and strike capabilities.
- **Indigenisation Push:** The investment underscores the government's commitment to indigenous defence manufacturing—with approvals extending to cutting-edge systems, private-sector participation, and readiness across land, sea, air, cyber, and space domains. This decision resonated positively in markets, with shares of defence firms like BEL and Ideaforge rising.

### PM's 'Mann Ki Baat' Programme Earns Over ₹34 Crore Since 2014: Government

**In the News:** On **August 8, 2025**, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting informed the **Rajya Sabha** that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's monthly address 'Mann Ki Baat' has generated **₹34.13 crore** in revenue since its launch in 2014.

#### Key Points

- **Revenue Since Inception:** Total receipts from the programme stand at **₹34.13 crore**, as per a **written reply** by Minister of State **L. Murugan** in the Upper House.
- **Cost Structure:** The show is **produced by Akashvani using existing in-house resources**, with the government stating there is **no additional expenditure** incurred for production.
- **Platforms & Reach:** Episodes are carried across **All India Radio (Akashvani)**, **Doordarshan**, and **digital/social media** channels, giving the programme multi-platform distribution.
- **Revenue Sources:** Media briefings attribute earnings to advertisements, sponsorships and allied streams tied to the broadcast and its syndication.
- **Start Date & Frequency:** ‘Mann Ki Baat’ debuted on October 3, 2014 and is aired monthly, featuring messages and stories the PM shares with listeners.

### **‘Bharat’ Taxi: Cooperatives Launch ₹300-Crore Ride-Hailing Platform to Rival Ola and Uber**

**In the News:** India’s cooperative sector is set to challenge ride-hailing giants with the upcoming launch of **‘Bharat’**, a cooperative-backed taxi service backed by an authorised capital of **₹300 crore**. The new platform, led by a consortium of eight major cooperatives, plans a **pan-India rollout by the end of 2025**, with its app expected to launch by December. Initial operations will commence across four states with over 200 drivers already onboarded.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Cooperative Consortium:** Organized under the **Multi-State Sahakari Taxi Cooperative Ltd**, the initiative brings together eight cooperatives—including **NCDC, IFFCO, GCMF, Krishak Bharati Cooperative Ltd, NABARD, NDDB, NCEL**—operating independently without government stake.
- **Driver Base & Geographic Spread:** Over **200 drivers** have joined from **Delhi, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra**, with the service looking to scale across additional regions.
- **App & Tech Strategy:** A tender has been floated to onboard a tech partner for app development, with the launch scheduled for **December 2025**. A **technology consultant and IIM-Bangalore** are assisting in shaping the marketing strategy for a unified, pan-India app interface.
- **Business Model & Goals:** The cooperative ride-hailing model seeks to:
  - **Ensure better earnings for drivers**
  - Provide **safe, affordable, and high-quality rides** for passengers
  - Leverage a **cooperative pricing model** with growing membership.
- **Strategic Timing:** The initiative stems from policy signals by **Cooperation Minister Amit Shah**, who had earlier indicated a push toward cooperative-led enterprises by 2025.

### **M.S. Swaminathan Award for Food and Peace: Honouring Food Security & Climate Justice**

**In the News:** On **August 7, 2025**, at the **M.S. Swaminathan Centenary International Conference** held at **ICAR Pusa, New Delhi**, Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** launched the **Global M.S. Swaminathan Award for Food and Peace**, established in memory of the “Father of India’s Green Revolution.” In the same event, he presented the **first-ever award** to **Professor Ademola A. Adenle of Nigeria**, recognising his outstanding contributions to combating hunger and promoting sustainable agriculture in developing nations.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Institution of the Award:** The award was created by the **M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)** in collaboration with The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), aimed at recognising exemplary efforts from individuals in developing countries in advancing food security, climate justice, and sustainable peace.
- **First Recipient: Professor Adenle of Nigeria**, serving as Senior Special Adviser on Agricultural Innovation in Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Agriculture, was conferred the inaugural award for his leadership in agricultural innovation, hunger eradication, rural empowerment, and climate resilience, especially among vulnerable communities.
- **Philosophical Underpinning:** PM Modi emphasized that “food is life,” quoting verses from the Upanishads to underscore the profound link between food security and global peace. He stated that a crisis in food inevitably leads to a crisis of life, breed unrest—and thus the award is both philosophically significant and practically urgent.

- **Broader Context:** The award was launched during a larger international conference commemorating Dr. M.S. Swaminathan's centenary, with themes rooted in **Evergreen Revolution** and **Bio-happiness**—his visionary ideas promoting sustainable, inclusive agriculture and biodiversity conservation.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI)

**In the News:** At the recently concluded **Ramsar COP15** (July 2025), the **Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI)** officially launched its **Strategic Plan 2025–2030**, setting the direction for coordinated wetland conservation across the Indo-Burma region.

#### Key Points:

- **Initiative & Launch:** The IBRRI was jointly developed by Ramsar National Focal Points of **Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam**, supported by the IUCN Asia Regional Office. Its Strategic Plan 2025–2030 was formally unveiled during a **COP15 side event** in July 2025.
- **Purpose & Scope:** Designed to operationalize the Ramsar Convention's Strategic Plan in a transboundary context, IBRRI aims to **halt and reverse wetland loss**, enhance climate resilience, and sustain ecosystems upon which about **250 million people** depend.
- **Governance Structure:** A **Steering Committee** comprising Ramsar authorities from all five member countries. A **Secretariat hosted by IUCN Asia Regional Office in Bangkok**. A **Stakeholder Committee** including government, NGOs, and academia for multi-actor guidance.
- **Strategic Objectives:** The five operational objectives include: (1) conserve and restore priority wetlands; (2) mainstream wetland adaptation into policy; (3) strengthen communication, education, participation; (4) mobilize sustainable financing; (5) ensure sound governance of IBRRI itself.
- **Regional Context :** The Indo-Burma Hotspot contains over **38 million hectares** of wetlands with high biodiversity, vital ecosystem services, and substantial threats from conversion, urbanization, hydropower, and climate change. Wetland ecosystems support fisheries, agriculture, flood regulation, and livelihoods for millions across Southeast Asia.
- **Partnerships & Collaborations:** Working in collaboration with IUCN's **BRIDGE project**. Renewed **MoU with the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP)** in January 2025 to strengthen migratory waterbird and wetland conservation efforts across flyway and Ramsar sites.

### India Becomes World's 5th Biggest Aviation Market

**In the News:** India emerged as the world's fifth-largest aviation market in 2024, carrying approximately **241 million passengers**, marking an **11.1% growth** over 2023. During the same period, the **Mumbai–Delhi air route** ranked as the **7th busiest flight corridor globally**, according to the World Air Transport Statistics (WATS) released by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

#### Key Points:

- **Market Position:** India handled roughly **241 million air passengers** in 2024—both domestic and international traffic combined—surpassing Japan to secure the **5th spot globally**, driven by robust growth year-on-year of **11.1%** compared to around **205 million** for Japan in the same period.
- **Growth Rate:** Passenger traffic rose significantly, reaching **241 million in 2024**, up from **211 million in 2023**, marking an **11.1% increase** year-on-year.
- **Top Route:** The **Mumbai–Delhi route** was identified as the **7th busiest air route in the world** in 2024, with an estimated **5.9 million passengers** flying between the two cities.
- **Global Rankings Context:** In 2024, the aviation market rankings were:
  1. United States (~876 million passengers)
  2. China (~741 million)
  3. United Kingdom (~261 million)
  4. Spain (~241 million)
  5. India (~241 million)

### India, Russia Sign Protocol to Deepen Industrial Cooperation at 11th Working Group Session

**In the News:** India and Russia reaffirmed their strategic partnership by signing a **Protocol to deepen industrial cooperation** during the **11th session of the India-Russia Working Group on Modernization and Industrial Cooperation** held in New Delhi.

#### Key Points:

- **High-level Engagement:** The session was co-chaired by **Amardeep Singh Bhatia**, Secretary of DPIIT, and **Alexey Gruzdev**, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of Russia. Approximately **80 delegates** from both nations participated.
- **Review and Forward Planning:** The dialogue reviewed progress since the 10th session and set the platform for deepening collaboration across numerous industrial sectors.
- **Core Sectors Covered:**
  - **Traditional sectors:** Aluminium, fertilizers, railway transport, and mining technology.
  - **Emerging areas:** Aerospace science and technology (including a modernized wind tunnel and small aircraft piston engines), carbon fibre tech, additive manufacturing, and 3D printing.
  - **Resource and infrastructure focus:** Exploration of rare earths and critical minerals extraction, underground coal gasification, modern industrial infrastructure, and waste management (industrial and domestic).
- **Strategic Commitment:** The signing of the protocol underscores both nations' resolve to expand industrial and economic cooperation and foster technology transfer.

### Moldova Becomes 107th Member of International Solar Alliance

**In the News:** Moldova officially became the **107th member of the International Solar Alliance (ISA)** by submitting its Instrument of Ratification during a ceremony in New Delhi.

#### Key Points:

- **Formal Accession:** The Republic of Moldova's Ambassador to India, Ana Taban, handed over the Instrument of Ratification to P. S. Gangadhar, Joint Secretary (Economic Diplomacy) at the ISA Secretariat.
- **Purpose of ISA Expansion:** The ISA, launched jointly by India and France at COP21 in 2015, aims to accelerate global solar energy adoption, reduce costs of solar technologies, and mobilize investments in sustainable energy projects.
- **Benefits for Moldova:** As a member, Moldova will gain access to ISA's technical support, capacity-building initiatives, financing tools, and multilateral partnerships to scale up its domestic solar energy deployment.
- **Broader ISA Role:** The Alliance promotes solar energy applications across critical sectors—such as agriculture, healthcare, transport, and power generation—serving as a global platform for policy dialogue, standardization, and resource mobilization.
- **India's Leadership in Clean Energy Diplomacy:** India continues to drive ISA's global expansion, reinforcing its role in climate diplomacy and in fostering collaborative solar development.

### Thailand and Cambodia Finalize Ceasefire Details, Pledge to Maintain Troop Levels

**In the News:** On **August 7, 2025**, Thailand and Cambodia concluded an Extraordinary **General Border Committee (GBC)** meeting in **Kuala Lumpur** and agreed on the **implementation terms of the July 28 ceasefire**. The joint statement freezes troop positions at **24:00 local time on July 28** and opens the door for **ASEAN monitoring** to help the truce hold.

#### Key Points

- **Troop Freeze (No Movements):** Both sides will maintain current deployments exactly as they stood at 24:00, July 28, 2025; no patrols or movements toward the other side's positions are permitted.
- **No Reinforcement:** The parties will not increase forces anywhere along the border, recognizing that reinforcements would heighten tensions.
- **No Provocations / Fortifications:** Each side will avoid actions that could escalate tensions, including entering the other's airspace/territory and building or enhancing military infrastructure beyond its own side.
- **Protection of Civilians:** The ceasefire covers all weapons and prohibits attacks on civilians and civilian objects; both sides reaffirm compliance with international law.
- **Captured Soldiers & IHL:** Parties must ensure humane treatment of captives and commit to immediate release and repatriation after active hostilities cease, in line with Geneva Convention (Art. 118) and ICRC Rule 128(A). (Context: 18 Cambodian soldiers remain a sticking point.)

- **Monitoring Mechanism:** A formal ASEAN observer team led by Malaysia will verify compliance. Interim observer teams (ASEAN defence attachés) will operate separately in each country and will not cross the border until the full mission deploys.
- **De-escalation & Information Discipline:** Both sides agreed to consult quickly at local level to prevent flare-ups and to refrain from spreading false information that could inflame tensions.
- **Follow-up Timelines:** The Regional Border Committee (RBC) will meet within two weeks; the next GBC session is due within one month, with regular direct lines kept open between ministers and defense chiefs.
- **Conflict Context:** The truce followed five days of intense fighting in late July, involving artillery and airstrikes, causing at least 43 deaths and 300,000+ displaced on both sides.

### Azerbaijan and Armenia Sign Historic Peace Deal at White House Summit

**In the News:** On **August 8, 2025**, Armenian Prime Minister **Nikol Pashinyan** and Azerbaijani President **Ilham Aliyev** signed a **U.S.-brokered peace agreement** at the **White House**, hosted by President **Donald Trump**. The deal includes the creation of a **new transit corridor**, dubbed the **Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP)**, linking Azerbaijan to its Nakhchivan exclave via Armenia—granting the U.S. exclusive development rights.

#### Key Points:

- **End of Decades-Long Conflict:** The agreement seeks to **normalize relations**, enhance economic cooperation, and put an end to nearly four decades of hostilities—particularly over Nagorno-Karabakh. (Reuters, Wikipedia)
- **Strategic Transit Corridor—TRIPP:** The **Zangezur corridor** (around 27 miles / ~43 km) will connect mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan enclave through Armenian territory. **U.S. granted exclusive development rights** for 99 years, with potential infrastructure including road, rail, pipelines, fiber optics, and electricity.
- **Shift in Geopolitics:** The deal significantly **diminishes Russian influence** in the South Caucasus region and positions the **U.S. as a principal mediator**. The longstanding OSCE Minsk Group is effectively sidelined. (Reuters, Washington Post, Reuters)
- **Mixed Reactions: Support** from Turkey, which sees boosted regional connectivity and trade potential. (Reuters) **Concern and opposition** from Iran, which warned of security risks and described the corridor as a geopolitical provocation, even issuing vivid criticism.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Tiger Introduction in Debrigarh Sanctuary – Odisha's Big-Cat Conservation Drive

**In the News:** On **29 July 2025**, marking International Tiger Day, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Prem Kumar Jha announced that the Odisha government has received technical approval from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) to convert Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary into a Tiger Reserve and to introduce tigers into its ecosystem. An expert committee has been set up to identify core and buffer zones; once finalized, steps will be taken to relocate tigers to the sanctuary.

#### Key Points

- **Pending Notification, NTCA Approval Since 2023:** Although NTCA's technical committee had cleared the sanctuary in January 2023, following the natural movement of a tiger into Debrigarh which previously had none—the Odisha government has yet to formally notify it as a tiger reserve.
- **Expert Committee & Zoning Plan:** Chaired by ex-NTCA member secretary Anup Nayak, the committee includes Wildlife Institute of India scientist Dr Bivash Pandav and academic Hema Kumar Nayak. It will delineate a ~353 km<sup>2</sup> core devoid of habitation and calculate buffer zones before tiger introduction.
- **Debrigarh's Status & Biodiversity:** Covering ~346.9 km<sup>2</sup>, near Hirakud Dam in Bargarh, Debrigarh is a UNESCO-recognized sanctuary since 1985. It supports over 40 mammal species including leopards, sloth bears, gaurs, chousingha, dholes, and migratory birds, making it ideal for big-cat restoration.
- **Historical Relocation Challenges in Odisha:** The Satkosia release of tigress Sundari (2018) failed tragically when the female earned a reputation due to alleged human conflict; the male, Mahavir, died in a poacher trap. In contrast, Similipal Tiger Reserve's last-year relocation of Jamuna and Zeenat was ~80% successful, though Zeenat briefly wandered into neighbouring states before returning to her territory. These cases inform risk mitigation strategies for Debrigarh.

- **Prey Supplementation & Community Engagement:** NTCA recommends prey species translocation to ensure sustainable food chains. The state plans to hold gram sabhas across 54 buffer villages, ensuring local participation in the reserve's declaration and long-term coexistence strategies.

### What caused Uttarkashi flash floods

**In the News :** Flash floods struck **Dharali village** in Uttarkashi district, Uttarakhand, triggered by intense rainfall and possibly a cloudburst. The floods left at least **four confirmed dead**, with dozens— including **11 Indian Army personnel**—still missing. Steep terrain, blocked roads, and landslides have significantly hampered rescue operations by SDRF, NDRF, and Indian Army teams.

#### Key Points:

- **Triggering Event :** Although initial reports cited a **cloudburst** in the upper Kheer Ganga catchment, experts now question this claim—IMD data shows no cloudburst activity registered in the area. Many scientists currently consider a **glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF)** or **glacier collapse or overflow** as a more likely cause, possibly compounded by landslides.
- **Geographic Drivers :** Uttarkashi's rugged, high-elevation terrain—characterized by steep slopes, deep gorges, and narrow valleys—means that even moderate heavy rainfall can trigger debris-laden flows rapidly traveling downstream, amplifying flash flood impacts.
- **Climate Vulnerability :** Experts underscore that the Himalayan region's fragility is intensified by **climate change**, which is increasing glacier melt, altering rainfall patterns, and making extreme precipitation events more frequent and intense. Additionally, unplanned development in ecologically sensitive areas exacerbates risks.
- **Rescue Challenges :** Landslides and blocked roads have severely impeded access, slowing rescue efforts. Teams have mobilized heavy machinery, drone surveillance, sniffer dogs, and makeshift ziplines to reach affected sites, including remote army camps.

### India Lost 18 Times More Forest Than It Gained Between 2015-2019

**In the News:** A recent study—conducted by IIT Bombay in collaboration with SASTRA Deemed University—revealed that between 2015 and 2019, India lost 18 square kilometres of forest for every 1 square kilometre gained.

#### Key Points:

- **Gross Loss vs Gain:** The study shows a gross forest loss of 1,032.89 sq km compared to a forest gain of just 56.3 sq km during the 2015–2019 period.
- **Nationwide Decline: Every state** in India recorded a net decrease in forest cover over this period.
- **Major Contributors:**
  - **Gains** occurred predominantly in fragmented patches (islets) across Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Rajasthan.
  - **Losses** were most severe in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, together accounting for nearly 50% of the total forest loss.
- **Fragmentation Concern:** More than half of the newly added forest areas were highly fragmented islets, lacking structural connectivity, which is crucial for ecological health.
- **Methodology vs FSI:** The study used **Copernicus Global Land Service (CGLS)** data with stricter thresholds (15% **canopy**; 100 m resolution), as opposed to the **Forest Survey of India (FSI)**, which uses a 10% canopy threshold and coarser imagery (23.5 m resolution). This difference may explain why official reports sometimes show forest cover increases, while the study reveals degradation in ecological quality.
- **Connectivity Mapping:** The researchers proposed a framework using **remote sensing** and **open-source tools** to monitor and analyze forest connectivity at both state and national levels.

## SCIENCE

### ISRO Launches HOPE Mission in Ladakh to Simulate Astronaut Life for Gaganyaan

**In the News:** ISRO inaugurated its **HOPE mission**—Himalayan Outpost for Planetary Exploration—in the **Tso Kar Valley, Ladakh**. This 10-day high-altitude analogue setup, operating at around **14,000 feet (approx. 4.3–4.5 km)**, simulates extraterrestrial conditions to help prepare for India's upcoming **Gaganyaan** and **human spaceflight missions**.

**Key Points:**

- **Mission Overview:** The HOPE mission is not merely a simulation but a “rehearsal for the future,” as stated by ISRO Chairman Dr V Narayanan during the inauguration. It aims to replicate planetary conditions to refine life-support systems, psychological protocols, and mission workflow for future human space exploration.
- **Location and Infrastructure:** Situated in Tso Kar Valley—chosen for its Mars-like high UV levels, low air pressure, extreme cold, and saline permafrost—the analog habitat comprises:
  - An **8-metre diameter habitat module** for crew living
  - A **5-metre utility module** for support systemsThese interconnected modules house hydroponic systems, sanitation, circadian lighting, and kitchen facilities.
- **Mission Goals:** The mission involves two selected analogue crew members living in complete isolation to simulate the **physiological and psychological stressors** of long-duration space missions. Parameters monitored include genomic, epigenetic, physiological, and psychological responses, alongside testing health-monitoring, planetary operations, and sample handling protocols.
- **Strategic Role:** HOPE is a milestone in India’s **Human Spaceflight Programme**, building knowledge essential for executing crewed low Earth orbit (Gaganyaan), lunar missions (targeted by 2040), and eventual interplanetary exploration. The analogue data informs design of habitats, crew workflows, and technology readiness.

## SPORTS

**AIFF Appoints Khalid Jamil as Head Coach of India Senior Men’s Football Team**

**In the News:** The All India Football Federation (AIFF), via its Executive Committee (EC) (virtually chaired by President Kalyan Chaubey), officially appointed Khalid Jamil as the next head coach of the Indian Senior Men’s National Football Team, a historic first for the national side in 13 years.

**Key Points**

- **Appointment & Process:** Khalid Jamil was selected during an EC meeting following a recommendation by the AIFF’s Technical Committee. A SWOT exercise evaluated him alongside Stephen Constantine and Štefan Tarkovič, and a majority ruled in favour of making Jamil the head coach for the team’s upcoming fixtures.
- **Historical Significance:** Jamil becomes the first Indian to be appointed as permanent head coach of the senior team since Savio Medeira (2011–12) marking a notable shift back to domestic leadership.
- **Coach Profile & Credentials:** An ex-international midfielder with over 40 caps for India, Jamil holds an AFC Pro License. He shot to fame by leading Aizawl FC to a miraculous I-League title in 2017, followed by strong performances with NorthEast United and Jamshedpur FC (including an ISL semifinal and Super Cup final in 2024).
- **Rationale & Selection Strategy:** Senior advisors like former national coach Armando Colaco and football legend Shabbir Ali urged the EC to favour an Indian coach, citing the need to nurture home-grown talent. Technical panel Chair IM Vijayan pointed out that India achieved its highest FIFA rankings under Indian coaches like Sukhwinder Singh and Syed Nayeemuddin. Jamil’s dual recognition as AIFF Men’s Coach of the Year (2023–24 & 2024–25) reinforced his candidacy.
- **Immediate Challenges & Fixture Schedule:** With the CAFA Nations Cup 2025 and back-to-back AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers vs Singapore scheduled within weeks, Jamil inherits a tight timeline to rebuild team confidence and tactical identity.

## ECONOMY

**RBI Approves Merger of New India Co-operative Bank with Saraswat Bank**

**In the News:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved the merger of **New India Co-operative Bank (NICB)** with **Saraswat Co-operative Bank**, under Section 44A(4) of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, making all NICB branches function as Saraswat Bank branches from that date.

**Key Points:**

- **Merger Effective Date & Regulatory Approval:** The amalgamation became effective on **August 4, 2025**, following an RBI sanction under the Banking Regulation Act.
- **Assumption of Assets & Liabilities:** Saraswat Bank will assume all of NICB’s assets, liabilities, and customers. NICB depositors and borrowers will now be treated as Saraswat customers, with their interests fully protected.

- **Pre-Merger Approval Process:** Shareholders of both banks approved the scheme—Saraswat at its Special General Meeting on **July 22, 2025**, and NICB at its Annual General Meeting—before seeking RBI clearance.
- **Background Context:** NICB had been placed under RBI moratorium in **February 2025** due to governance failures and a ₹122 crore embezzlement scandal, prompting regulatory intervention and board supersession.
- **Scale & Financial Health Comparison:** Saraswat Bank, India's largest urban cooperative bank, had a business volume of around ₹91,814 crore and capital adequacy of ~17%, while NICB's business stood at ₹3,560 crore with significantly weaker financials. Saraswat is thus well-positioned to absorb the merger impact.

### Hong Kong Rolls Out Stablecoin Regulations to Lead Global Digital Finance

**In the News:** Hong Kong officially enacted its **Stablecoins Ordinance (Cap. 656)**, instituting a rigorous regulatory framework that mandates **full reserve backing**, **selective licensing**, and **stringent AML/CFT compliance**, signaling its ambitions to lead in global digital finance.

#### Key Points:

- **Regulatory Launch:** The **Stablecoins Ordinance**, passed in May 2025, went into effect on **August 1, 2025**, empowering the **Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA)** to license and supervise fiat-referenced stablecoin issuers.
- **Full Reserve Mandate:** Issuers must maintain **100% high-quality fiat reserves**, segregate customer and issuer funds, support rapid redemption, undergo audits, and uphold robust governance and risk frameworks, including **HK\$25 million (≈US\$3.2M) minimum capital**.
- **Selective Licensing Approach:** HKMA plans to grant **only 3–4 licences initially** in early 2026, favoring large, well-capitalized firms. As of launch, **no licences** have yet been issued.
- **Application Timelines:** Institutions are invited to **express interest by August 31, 2025**, with finalized licence applications due by **September 30, 2025**. Interested applicants may receive preliminary regulatory feedback during this period.
- **Market Participants & Interest:** Major firms like **Ant Group (Ant International)**, **JD.com's JD Chain**, **Standard Chartered**, and **Circle Technology** are preparing applications, focusing on USD-, HKD-, and offshore RMB-pegged stablecoins.

### India's Business Confidence Index Rises to 149.4 in April–June

**In the News:** India's **Business Confidence Index (BCI)** surged to **149.4**, up from **139.3** in the prior quarter, as revealed in the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)'s latest Business Expectations Survey. This notable rise reflects a substantial boost in corporate optimism regarding future economic conditions.

#### Key Points:

- **BCI Surge:** India's Business Confidence Index climbed significantly to **149.4** in Q1 FY 2025–26 (April–June), from **139.3** in the preceding quarter.
- **Measurement Components:** The BCI draws from four dimensions—anticipated improvement in overall economic conditions, better financial health of firms, favorable investment climate, and higher or optimal capacity utilization.
- **Optimism Across Indicators:**
  - **Production:** 78.7 % of firms expect an increase.
  - **Domestic Sales:** 79.1 % foresee growth.
  - **Exports:** 66.5 % anticipate improved performance.
  - **Raw Material Imports:** 54.3 % anticipate higher imports, up from 46.1 %.
- **Profit Expectations:** Nearly 61 % of surveyed firms foresee a rise in pre-tax profits, indicating strong anticipated margins.
- **Labor Market Remains Slow:** Despite upbeat sentiment on output and sales, the labor market outlook remains muted—with no expected change in hiring or wages over the next six months.
- **Survey Details:** The survey was conducted in **June 2025**, featuring insights from **479 firms** across six major cities in India.

### RBI Monetary Policy Statement 2025-26

**In the News:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) unanimously decided to **keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 5.50%**, maintaining a **'Neutral'** stance, following a significant 50 bp rate cut in June. The central bank also **lowered its inflation forecast for FY26 from 3.7% to 3.1%**, while retaining the **GDP growth projection at 6.5%**.

#### Key Points:

- **Rate Pause:** The RBI held the repo rate steady at **5.50%**, following three cumulative rate cuts since February totaling 100 bps. The neutral approach aligns with its goal of balancing growth support with inflation control.
- **Monetary Stance:** The policy approach remains **Neutral**, signaling the RBI's intent to allow previous easing measures to permeate the economy while monitoring evolving macroeconomic indicators.
- **Growth Outlook:** The GDP forecast for FY26 is maintained at **6.5%**, underpinned by robust rural demand, steady consumption, and favourable monsoon conditions.
- **Inflation Forecast Lowered:** CPI inflation projection for FY26 has been revised downward to **3.1%** from 3.7%, reflecting falling food prices and easing retail inflation. June wholesale inflation dropped to a six-year low at **2.1%**.
- **Liquidity & CRR Shift:** The **CRR cut** announced in June (from 4% to 3%) will begin implementation from **September 6, 2025**, designed to enhance systemic liquidity. Other rates—**SDF (5.25%)**, **MSF/Bank Rate (5.75%)**—remain unchanged.
- **Global Trade Risks:** Despite U.S. trade tensions and looming tariffs on Indian exports, the RBI held steady, suggesting **confidence** in domestic economic resilience. Governor Sanjay Malhotra cited India's lower dependence on external factors for inflation dynamics.
- **Analyst Perspective:** Many analysts infer that this may be the **end of the RBI's easing cycle**, given the cautious outlook and narrowing space for further rate reductions in the near term.

### Trump's additional 25% tariff on India brings tariffs on India to 50%, highest tariffs worldwide

**In the News:** U.S. President **Donald Trump** signed an executive order imposing an **additional 25% tariff** on imports from India—effectively doubling the total tariff rate to **50%**, the highest the U.S. imposes on any country. The increase was in response to India's continued importation of Russian oil. The new tariffs will take effect **21 days later**, with exemptions for in-transit shipments arriving before September 17.

#### Key Points:

- **Tariff Escalation:** The U.S. raised its import duties on Indian goods from 25% to **50%**, setting a new record for U.S. tariff levels on any trading partner. ([turn0news17], [turn0news16])
- **Reason Cited:** Trump justified the move as a punitive response to India's **ongoing purchases of Russian oil**, which he claimed financially support Russia's war effort. The action was underpinned by authorities under the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act**, among others.
- **India's Reaction:** The Indian government condemned the decision as "**selective and unfair**" and "extremely unfortunate," arguing that its oil imports are **market-driven and necessary for its population**. ([turn0news19], [turn0news17])
- **Timing & Exemptions:** The tariff hike becomes enforceable **21 days after August 6**, with a carve-out for shipments arriving before September 17. ([turn0news16], [turn0search6])
- **Economic and Diplomatic Impact:** Analysts warn that the heightened tariff could **undermine India's \$4 trillion economy**, potentially reducing GDP growth by **over 80 basis points** and rendering exports to the U.S. (valued around \$87 billion last year) **unviable**. ([turn0news17])
- **Sectoral Pressures:** Indian textile exporters—like **Gokaldas Exports, Pearl Global, Indo Count Industries, KPR Mill, and Welspun Living**—are expected to face heightened market stress, as the U.S. is a critical destination for their goods.

### Tata Motors Acquires Iveco for €3.8 Billion in Biggest Deal Since Corus

**In the News:** Tata Motors announced it will acquire the commercial vehicle business of Italy's Iveco Group in an all-cash deal worth approximately **€3.8 billion**—marking Tata's largest global acquisition since the Corus deal. The acquisition excludes Iveco's defence division, which is being sold separately to Leonardo. The transaction, expected to close in the **first half of 2026**, aims to create a formidable global player in the commercial vehicle space

#### Key Points:

- **Transaction Overview:** Tata Motors will execute a **voluntary tender offer** at **€14.1 per share**, backed by full financing. The deal excludes Iveco's defence unit, which has been sold to Leonardo for **€1.7 billion**.
- **Deal Scope & Strategic Rationale:** The combined entity is projected to generate roughly **€22 billion in annual revenues**, with sales exceeding **540,000 units** across Europe (~50%), India (~35%), and the Americas (~15%). This acquisition strengthens Tata's commercial vehicle offerings through geographic and product diversification.
- **Funding & Financial Structuring:** The initial financing includes a **bridge loan** from Morgan Stanley and MUFG, complemented by plans to raise about **€1 billion in equity** and monetize Tata Capital stake to repay the debt over four years.

- **Governance & Safeguards:** Tata has committed to maintain Iveco's **workforce, operations, and brand identity** for a minimum of two years post-acquisition. The Italian government is closely monitoring the deal under "golden power" norms to ensure preservation of jobs and strategic assets.
- **Valuation & Premiums:** The offer includes a **22–25% premium** over Iveco's 3-month average share price (~€16.02), with an effective premium of **34–41%** after accounting for an extraordinary dividend from the defence sale.
- **Strategic Implications & Analyst Views:** This acquisition aligns with Tata's ambition to build a **future-ready global commercial vehicle ecosystem** by integrating Iveco's technology in areas like electrification and ADAS. Analysts view the valuation as reasonable—forecasting a **16% return on invested capital**, well above Tata's cost of capital.

### **AU Small Finance Bank Makes History: First SFB to Get RBI Nod for Universal Bank Status**

**In the News:** On **August 7, 2025**, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** granted **in-principle approval** to **AU Small Finance Bank (AU SFB)** to transition into a **universal bank**, marking the **first such approval in nearly a decade**. This opens the way for the bank to offer a full spectrum of banking services.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Historic Milestone:** AU SFB is the **first small finance bank (SFB)** in India to receive in-principle permission to become a **universal bank**, a status not granted since Bandhan Bank in 2015.
- **Expanded Capabilities:** Transitioning to a universal bank allows AU to **issue larger loans, serve more customers, and create subsidiaries**, breaking free of limitations under the SFB structure.
- **Robust Performance Metrics:** For the quarter ending June 30, AU SFB posted a **16% year-on-year rise** in net profit to **₹581 crore**, alongside a gross non-performing asset (NPA) ratio of **2.47%**.
- **Regulatory Preconditions:** The RBI approval is conditional. The bank's promoter, Sanjay Agarwal, must transfer his **22% equity stake** into a separate **Non-Operative Financial Holding Company (NOFHC)** within **18 months** to comply with corporate governance norms.
- **Shift of Headquarters:** As part of the transition plans, AU SFB will **relocate its corporate office from Jaipur to Mumbai**.