

Weekly Current Affairs 10 May to 16th May 2026

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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Vijay takes oath as Tamil Nadu CM

In the News: Actor-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at a grand ceremony held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai. Nine MLAs took oath as Cabinet Ministers in his first Cabinet, with Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar administering the oath of office and secrecy. The Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) formed the government with the support of an alliance comprising the Indian National Congress (INC), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) — CPI(M), Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), and Indian Union Muslim League (IUML).

Key Points:

- **Swearing-In Ceremony:** C. Joseph Vijay was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on Sunday, May 10, 2026, at a grand ceremony held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai.
- **Oath Administered:** Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar administered the oath of office and secrecy to the Chief Minister and nine Cabinet Ministers.
- **Formation of Government:** The Governor had formally appointed Vijay and invited him to form the government after he crossed the majority mark in the Tamil Nadu Assembly with the support of his alliance partners.
- **Alliance Composition:** The Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) formed the government with the support of the Indian National Congress (INC), Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) — CPI(M), Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), and Indian Union Muslim League (IUML).
- **TVK's Tally:** The TVK secured 120 seats in the 234-member Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, marking the party's first major electoral breakthrough in state politics.
- **First-Time MLAs:** Of the 120 TVK MLAs, 93 are first-time legislators, reflecting the party's emergence as a new political force in Tamil Nadu and a generational shift in the state's politics.
- **Nine-Member Cabinet:** Vijay's first Cabinet comprises nine ministers — N. Anand, Aadhav Arjuna, K.G. Arunraj, K.A. Sengottaiyan, P. Venkataramanan, R. Nirmalkumar, Rajmohan, T.K. Prabhu, and S. Keerthana.
- **About Vijay's Political Journey:** C. Joseph Vijay, popularly known as "Thalapathy Vijay," is a leading Tamil film actor who entered politics by launching the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), making the 2026 Tamil Nadu Assembly elections his electoral debut.

Growers seek status quo on import duty on natural rubber

In the News: The United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI) has urged the Government of India to maintain the status quo on the import duty on natural rubber, even as a section of the rubber user industry has sought a reduction in import duty on key inputs and raw materials. The Association highlighted that the rubber plantation sector sustains nearly 13.2 lakh growers and provides employment to around 4.2 lakh workers, and warned that any cut in import duty would severely affect domestic prices, livelihoods, and the long-term viability of natural rubber cultivation in India.

Key Points:

- **UPASI's Demand:** The United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI) has urged the government to maintain the status quo on the import duty on natural rubber, opposing demands from a section of the rubber user industry for a reduction in import duty on key inputs and raw materials.
- **Cultivation Area and Production:** India currently has about 9.4 lakh hectares under natural rubber cultivation, with production in the Financial Year 2025-26 (FY26) estimated at approximately 9 lakh tonnes.
- **Price Trend:** Domestic rubber prices have shown a modest upward trend in recent months due to geopolitical developments and production shortages both globally and domestically, but Indian rubber prices remained subdued in comparison with international prices over the last two years.
- **Rising Input Costs:** The prices of major inputs such as fertilisers, plant protection chemicals, and skilled labour have increased at 8-12% over the past decade, squeezing growers' margins and making cultivation increasingly difficult.



- **Compound Rubber Imports:** Of particular concern is the growing share of compound rubber imports, which now account for nearly 40% of total rubber imports into India.
- **Duty-Free ASEAN Imports:** Most of the compound rubber is imported from Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries duty-free under existing trade arrangements, undercutting domestic growers' prices.
- **Demand from Karnataka:** The Karnataka State Rubber Cultivators' Hitharakshana Vedike has called for an increase in the import duty on rubber, demanded that rubber be declared a horticulture crop, and urged the state government to intervene in the market and ensure a minimum price of Rs 250 per kg for rubber.
- **Tyre Industry Pressure:** Tyre manufacturers and rubber product industries have historically sought a reduction in the import duty on natural rubber, arguing that high duties raise input costs, while growers' bodies have consistently opposed such cuts to protect domestic prices.

India Just Launched Something Big in Warangal – Here's Why It Matters

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated (virtually) India's first functional PM MITRA Park (Prime Minister Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel Park) in Warangal, Telangana, as part of the launch of multiple development projects in Hyderabad. Built at a cost of ₹1,695.54 crore, the park is expected to attract over ₹6,000 crore in investments and generate more than 24,400 jobs, marking a historic milestone in India's textile growth journey and positioning Warangal as a global textile hub.

Key Points:

- **About PM MITRA Scheme:** PM MITRA (Prime Minister Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel) Park is a government-backed initiative to create world-class, integrated textile manufacturing hubs across India. The scheme operationalises the 5F vision, Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign, bringing the entire textile value chain from raw cotton to finished garments and exports under one ecosystem.
- **Inauguration in Warangal:** PM Modi inaugurated India's first functional PM MITRA Park in Warangal, Telangana, alongside other major development projects such as the Zaheerabad Industrial Area, the Indian Oil terminal at Malkapur, and key railway projects on the Kazipet-Vijayawada multi-tracking line.
- **Project Cost and Scale:** The Warangal PM MITRA Park has been built at a cost of ₹1,695.54 crore and is spread across 1,327 acres, with 62% of the land already allotted to industries. It is strategically located near NH-163 and the proposed Nagpur-Vijayawada Greenfield Expressway (NH-163G), ensuring multimodal connectivity for exports.
- **Investment and Employment:** The park is expected to attract investments of over ₹6,000 crore in textile and apparel units and generate more than 24,400 jobs, with thousands already created. A notable anchor tenant, Evertop Textile and Apparel Complex Pvt. Ltd., is investing ₹1,051 crore and is expected to employ 12,800 people with an annual turnover of ₹1,990 crore.
- **Infrastructure and Sustainability:** The park features an internal road network, a dedicated power substation, and assured water supply. Sustainability measures include a Common Effluent Treatment Plant upgraded to Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) technology, a planned 10 MW solar power plant, expanded worker dormitories, and common boiler facilities for processing units.
- **Government Support and Incentives:** Approved under the PM MITRA Scheme in March 2023, the Warangal park is eligible for ₹200 crore Development Capital Support and ₹300 crore Competitive Incentive Support (CIS). Units set up in the park can also avail benefits under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Textiles.
- **National Network of PM MITRA Parks:** The Government of India has approved seven PM MITRA Parks across the country: Telangana (Warangal), Tamil Nadu (Virudhnagar), Gujarat (Navsari), Karnataka (Kalaburagi), Madhya Pradesh (Dhar), Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow), and Maharashtra (Amravati), each strategically located to strengthen the textile ecosystem.

From Ruins to Glory: Somnath's Incredible Journey Celebrated Nationwide

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Somnath Temple in Gujarat to mark 75 years since the inauguration of the restored temple by India's first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, in 1951. The visit, part of the ongoing 'Somnath Swabhimani Parv', also commemorates 1,000 years since the first recorded invasion of the Somnath Temple in

1026, celebrating the temple's remarkable journey from "Vidhvans" (destruction) to "Srijan" (creation) as a symbol of India's civilisational resilience and unity.

Key Points:

- **About Somnath Temple:** The Somnath Temple is located at Prabhas Patan on the Saurashtra coast of Gujarat and is revered as the first among the twelve Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva. The temple finds mention in ancient texts such as the Shiva Purana and the Dwadasha Jyotirlinga Stotram and is considered one of the holiest pilgrimage centres in India.
- **Somnath Swabhiman Parv:** The ongoing Somnath Swabhiman Parv commemorates two major historical milestones, 1,000 years since the first recorded invasion of the temple in 1026, and 75 years since the reopening of the reconstructed temple on May 11, 1951. The celebration reflects India's civilisational resilience and cultural confidence.
- **Historical Journey:** Between the 11th and 18th centuries, the Somnath Temple was repeatedly attacked and destroyed. The temple is associated with Lord Shiva and Chandra Dev (the Moon God). Ancient scriptures state that a Pradakshina of the divine Prabhasa (Somnath) is considered equivalent to a Pradakshina of the whole earth itself, highlighting its unique spiritual importance.
- **Key Historical Figures:** Several rulers and leaders contributed to rebuilding the temple, including Chakravarti Maharaja Dharasena IV of Vallabhi (Second Temple), Raja Bhoja, Karna Deva, Siddharaja Jayasimha, Bhava Brihaspati, King Kumarapala Solanki (12th century), the rulers of Junagadh (13th century), and Punyashlok Ahilyabai Holkar, who consecrated the new temple in the 18th century. Brave personalities such as Veer Hamirji Gohil and Veer Vegdaji Bhil are remembered for their sacrifice in defending the temple.
- **Inauguration in 1951:** The restored Somnath Temple was ceremonially inaugurated on May 11, 1951, by Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India. In his address, Dr Prasad described Somnath as a symbol of India's spiritual revival and stated that the temple proclaims to the world that anything with unparalleled faith and love cannot be destroyed.
- **Architectural Highlights:** The temple features a 155-foot Shikhar (spire), a 10-tonne Kalash atop the temple, a 27-foot Dhvajdand symbolising spiritual continuity, 1,666 gold-plated Kalash, and 14,200 Dhwajas installed within the complex, reflecting the grandeur of traditional Indian temple architecture along the Arabian Sea coastline.
- **Special Pujas:** As a tribute to the temple's thousand-year journey and the courage of those who defended it, special pujas will be conducted at Somnath for the next 1,000 days, with several devotees contributing donations for the same.

Supreme Court's Latest 498A Ruling Explained Simply: What Families Should Know

In the News: In a recent ruling reported on May 11, 2026, the Supreme Court of India allowed criminal proceedings under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) against a husband to continue but quashed the FIR against his family members, holding that the allegations against the in-laws were too general and lacked specific evidence. The judgment reflects the Court's evolving approach in balancing protection of women from cruelty and dowry harassment with safeguards against the misuse of Section 498A IPC.

Key Points:

- **About Section 498A IPC:** Section 498A was introduced in the Indian Penal Code in 1983 to protect married women from cruelty, harassment, and dowry-related abuse by their husbands or relatives. It prescribes imprisonment up to three years and a fine for any such offence. Cruelty under the section covers wilful conduct likely to drive a woman to suicide or cause grave injury to her life, limb, or health, as well as harassment to coerce unlawful demands for property or valuable security.
- **Latest Supreme Court Ruling:** In the recent case, the wife accused her husband and his family of cruelty and dowry harassment. The Court found direct allegations against the husband but held that the accusations against the in-laws were broad and lacked specific supporting details. Accordingly, it allowed proceedings against the husband to continue while quashing the FIR against the relatives, reinforcing the principle of individual accountability based on evidence.
- **Judicial Concern over Misuse:** The Supreme Court has repeatedly cautioned that vague or exaggerated allegations without specific evidence can lead to misuse of Section 498A. In *Dara Lakshmi Narayana v. State of Telangana (2024)*, the Court held that mere reference to the names of family members in a matrimonial dispute, without specific allegations indicating their active involvement, should be nipped in the bud. In *Archin Gupta v. State of Haryana (2025)*, it further stressed that Section 498A should not be applied mechanically.

- **Need for Specific Allegations:** In *Kakhshian Kausar v. State of Bihar* (2022) and *Geddamm Jhansi v. State of Telangana* (2025), the Court held that husband's relatives cannot be forced to undergo trial in the absence of specific allegations of dowry demand or active involvement. The Court observed that criminal trials inflict severe scars even on those eventually acquitted, and that implicating all relatives without prima facie evidence amounts to abuse of the process of law.
- **Constitutionality and Continuing Relevance:** In *Janshruti v. Union of India* (2025), the Supreme Court rejected a petition challenging the constitutionality of Section 498A and seeking gender-neutral guidelines. The Court held that mere possibility or occasional misuse of a legal provision does not render it constitutionally infirm. It reiterated that Section 498A continues to serve as a vital instrument of protection against the deeply entrenched social evil of dowry, while courts must ensure prosecutions are supported by clear, specific evidence.

Why PM Modi's call to save forex could slow down India's growth

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a speech delivered in Jamnagar, Gujarat, urged Indians to save foreign exchange (forex) by curbing consumption of imported goods such as gold, crude oil, and edible oil amid the ongoing war in Iran and the resultant pressure on India's Balance of Payments and the rupee. While the appeal is aimed at protecting India's forex reserves, economists have cautioned that a sharp cut in consumption could slow down India's economic growth and may not be a sustainable solution.

Key Points:

- **PM's Appeal to Save Forex:** PM Modi has urged Indians to stop buying gold for a year, postpone foreign travel, work from home where possible to reduce consumption of imported crude oil, cut the use of edible oil in food by 10%, and reduce the use of chemical fertilisers by half by shifting to natural farming. He also emphasised buying "Made in India" products and being "vocal for local".
- **Context of the Appeal:** The call comes in the wake of the war in Iran, which has triggered supply and price shocks in commodities like crude oil and fertilisers. Crude prices have crossed USD 100 per barrel, and the rupee has weakened against the dollar.
- **Forex and Import Dependence:** India's total import bill in FY26 stood at USD 775 billion, with four commodities alone accounting for over USD 240 billion: crude oil (USD 134.7 billion), gold (USD 72 billion), vegetable oils (USD 19.5 billion), and fertilisers (USD 14.5 billion). India is the world's second-largest gold buyer, and gold imports alone form nearly 10% of the total import bill.
- **Balance of Payments Pressure:** India's Balance of Payments (BoP) surplus has weakened since mid-2024. The current account deficit (CAD) is projected by the IMF to widen to USD 84.5 billion in 2026, around 2% of GDP. The capital account surplus has shrunk, and at times turned into a deficit, leaving India's BoP situation comparable to 2013, when India was labelled one of the "Fragile Five" economies by Morgan Stanley.
- **Forex Reserves Status:** India's forex reserves stand at around USD 690.69 billion. Reserves had risen close to USD 728 billion in February 2026 before slipping back to around USD 691 billion in April 2026 as global uncertainty intensified and the RBI drew down reserves to defend the rupee.
- **Potential Forex Savings from Gold Cutback:** A 30-40% fall in gold imports could save USD 20-25 billion, while a 50% fall could save USD 36 billion, nearly half of the projected current account deficit, thereby reducing dollar outflow significantly.
- **Two Approaches to Tackle Forex Issue:** There are two broad approaches to deal with the forex situation: reducing demand for dollars by cutting domestic consumption, or boosting India's ability to earn forex by improving domestic production and exports. PM Modi's suggestions focus exclusively on the first approach.

Centre Notifies 1% Construction Welfare Cess

In the News: The Government of India has notified a 1% cess on the total cost of construction incurred by employers for building and other construction works under the Code on Social Security, 2020. The notification, issued under Section 100(1) of the Code on Social Security, 2020, replaces an earlier notification dated 26 September 1996 and aims to fund welfare measures for construction workers in the unorganised sector.

Key Points:



- **Legal Basis:** The construction welfare cess has been notified under Section 100(1) of the Code on Social Security, 2020, which is one of the four labour codes of India. The new notification replaces the earlier notification dated 26 September 1996, updating the legal framework for the levy.
- **Rate of Cess:** The cess is levied at the rate of 1% of the total construction cost paid by employers for building and other construction works. The levy applies to commercial buildings regardless of the construction cost involved.
- **Coverage and Exemptions:** Under the new labour codes, individuals building houses costing less than ₹50 lakh are exempt from paying the building cess with effect from 21 November 2025. Earlier, the exemption threshold was much lower, applying to houses costing less than ₹10 lakh or properties above 100 square metres.
- **Welfare Use:** Collections from the cess are utilised for welfare measures for construction workers, including health benefits, financial aid, insurance, and educational support for workers' children. This ensures targeted social security coverage for workers engaged in the building and construction sector.
- **Administration of Funds:** The cess collections are managed through Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Boards, which function under the welfare framework for workers in the unorganised sector. These Boards administer welfare funds for construction workers in many States and Union Territories.
- **Related Tax Exemption:** The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) granted Section 10(46) income-tax exemption to the West Bengal Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board on 14 January 2026, recognising its role as a statutory welfare body for construction workers.
- **About the Code on Social Security, 2020:** The Code on Social Security, 2020, is one of the four labour codes enacted by the Government of India to consolidate and amend laws relating to social security for workers in the organised and unorganised sectors, including construction workers.

What Is 'Annapurna Bhandaar' Scheme - Why is it Important for Women of West Bengal?

In the News: The newly formed BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government in West Bengal, led by Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari, held its first cabinet meeting at the state secretariat, Nabanna, and announced the launch of the "Annapurna Bhandaar" scheme along with free bus travel for women and the implementation of Ayushman Bharat in the state, all set to commence from June 1, 2026.

Key Points:

- **Annapurna Bhandaar Scheme:** Under the "Annapurna Bhandaar" scheme, financial assistance of 3,000 rupees per month will be directly credited to eligible women's bank accounts starting June 1, 2026. The scheme was a key electoral promise made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the West Bengal assembly election campaign.
- **Ayushman Bharat Implementation:** The Central Government's flagship health insurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat, will be officially implemented in West Bengal from June 1, 2026, bringing the state under the ambit of one of the largest public health initiatives in the country. Ayushman Bharat provides health insurance coverage to eligible families and is expected to significantly increase access to healthcare benefits for people across the state. The state government has also clarified that existing welfare schemes - currently running in West Bengal will continue alongside Ayushman Bharat without any disruption.
- **Free Bus Travel for Women:** Starting June 1, 2026, women in West Bengal will be able to travel free of charge on all government buses across the state. This initiative is expected to benefit a large number of daily commuters, including working women and students who rely heavily on public transport for their livelihoods and education.
- **Continuity of Existing Welfare Schemes:** Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari has clearly stated that no existing public welfare schemes in West Bengal will be discontinued under the new government. Instead, the administration has committed to improving and strengthening the ongoing programmes to make them more effective and accessible.

India's Latest Mission Could Change Rural Jobs Forever Under VB-G RAM G Act From July 1, 2026

In the News: The Union Government notified that the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, popularly known as the VB-G RAM G Act, will come into force across the country from July 1, 2026, replacing the two-decade-old Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005.

Key Points:



- **MGNREGA Repealed and Enhanced Guarantee:** From July 1, 2026, all rules, notifications, schemes, orders and guidelines made under MGNREGA will stand repealed. The VB-G RAM G Act increases the statutory employment guarantee for rural households from 100 days to 125 days annually, with workers continuing to receive unemployment allowance if jobs are not provided within the prescribed timeframe. Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan described the move as the dawn of a "new era in the lives of labourers."
- **Record Budget Allocation and Development Themes:** The Central Government has allocated 95,692.31 crore rupees for FY 2026-27, described as the highest-ever Budget Estimate allocation for any rural employment programme, with total outlay expected to cross 1.51 lakh crore rupees including state contributions. The programme's works have been grouped into four thematic areas, namely Water Security covering groundwater recharge and watershed development, Core Rural Infrastructure including rural roads and sanitation systems, Livelihood Infrastructure encompassing storage units and rural markets, and Climate and Disaster Resilience covering flood management and post-disaster restoration
- **Worker Protections and Technology-Driven Governance:** Wages will be directly transferred into workers' bank or post office accounts through the DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) system, with payments to be made weekly or within 15 days of closure of muster rolls. If wages are delayed, workers will receive compensation at the rate of 0.05 per cent of unpaid wages for every day of delay after the 16th day, and worksite facilities such as drinking water, shaded rest areas and first-aid kits have been given statutory backing. Attendance will be captured through NMMS-enabled (National Mobile Monitoring System) systems and face authentication, while all works will be integrated into the VB-NRIS (Viksit Bharat-National Rural Infrastructure Stack) linked with PM Gati Shakti and spatial planning systems.

NEET-UG cancelled: Why this is a first, what happened in past paper leak cases

In the News: The National Testing Agency (NTA) cancelled the NEET-UG 2026 examination, which was conducted on May 3 for approximately 23 lakh candidates, after investigations found that several questions similar to those in the actual exam paper had been circulated before the test. This marks the first time since NTA took over NEET-UG conduct in 2019 that the medical entrance examination has been completely scrapped. The case has been handed over to the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) for a comprehensive probe.

Key Points:

- **Cancellation Decision and Paper Leak Trail:** The NTA announced the cancellation with the approval of the Government of India after investigative findings established that the examination process "could not be allowed to stand." A PDF containing around 410 questions was found circulating, out of which 120 of chemistry and biology sections of the examination. The leaked material was reportedly in circulation about 45 hours before the examination, with a verification exercise confirming the PDF was present on a few mobile phones on May 1 and May 2. NTA Director General Abhishek Singh stated that even a single matching question violates the agency's commitment to zero tolerance and zero error.
- **Arrests and Investigation Network:** Rajasthan SOG (Special Operations Group) arrested at least 15 people in connection with the alleged leak, with key accused including Manish Yadav and Rakesh Mandwaria, who is suspected of links to a consultancy centre in Sikar. The leak network is suspected to have been traced from a printing agency in Jaipur, spreading across Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala and Uttarakhand, with the leaked material allegedly sold at rates ranging from 25,000 rupees to 40 lakh rupees. The CBI registered an FIR (First Information Report) invoking sections of criminal conspiracy, cheating and criminal breach of trust under BNS (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita), besides the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Public Examination Prevention of Unfair Means Act, 2024, and conducted raids at 12 places across the country.
- **Re-examination Arrangements:** The NTA clarified that the exam will be re-conducted on revised dates to be notified within 7-10 days, with candidates not required to re-register or pay any additional fee. All applications, candidature details and exam centre preferences from the May 2026 cycle will remain valid, and fees already paid would be refunded. Conducting NEET costs approximately 200 crore rupees while the agency earns about 300 crore rupees from application fees, and the re-test will be conducted using NTA's internal resources.
- **Past Paper Leak Precedents:** In 2024, NEET-UG faced similar allegations of paper leaks, with the CBI inquiry revealing that candidates paid to receive solved papers hours before the exam in Jharkhand, though the Supreme Court refused demands for a full retest noting the evidence was not indicative of a "systemic leak." In 2015, the AIPMT (All India Pre-



Medical/Pre-Dental Test) conducted by CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) was cancelled by the Supreme Court after electronic devices were used by candidates to access answer keys. The current cancellation is the first time the exam has been scrapped in its entirety since NTA took over conduct in 2019.

- **Post-2024 Reforms and Their Failure:** After the 2024 controversy, a seven-member committee headed by former ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) chief K. Radhakrishnan recommended sealing testing centres in the presence of district administration and police, computer-based testing in multiple shifts, and collaboration between NTA and state administrations. For the 2026 exam, measures such as biometric verification of candidates, transport of exam material in GPS-enabled vehicles with police escort and CCTV surveillance at centres with centralised monitoring at NTA headquarters were implemented. Despite these enhanced security measures, the paper leak still occurred, raising serious questions about the credibility of the national examination system.

Supreme Court Forms Panel to Overhaul Court Infrastructure Nationwide

In the News: Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant has constituted a "Judicial Infrastructure Advisory Committee" to prepare a comprehensive roadmap for strengthening judicial infrastructure across India. The committee, headed by Supreme Court Justice Aravind Kumar, has been tasked with securing a government allocation of Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000 crore for court modernisation. The panel has been asked to submit an interim report by August 31, 2026, to Sanjeev Sanyal, a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council.

Key Points:

- **Committee Composition and Mandate:** The committee is chaired by Supreme Court Justice Aravind Kumar and includes Justice Debansu Basak of the Calcutta High Court, Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, Justice Somasekhara Sundaresan of the Bombay High Court, and the Director General of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD). Supreme Court Secretary General Bharat Parashar will function as Member Secretary. The committee aims to ensure a unified infrastructural ecosystem on a pan-India basis, keeping in view the varied requirements of different High Courts and District Courts.
- **Scope and Key Focus Areas:** The committee will focus on seven key areas, including identifying systemic constraints in the justice delivery system, recommending improved facilities for judges, lawyers, litigants and court staff, and implementing cutting-edge technology to accelerate case disposal. It will also examine computerisation of courts, citizen-centric services aimed at bridging the digital divide, and the construction of modern court complexes designed for the 21st century. The e-Courts initiative has been identified as a specific area of focus.
- **Context of Mounting Judicial Challenges:** The initiative comes at a time when concerns over mounting pendency of cases, shortage of courtrooms, inadequate staffing, lack of basic facilities and uneven technological integration continue to dominate discussions around judicial reforms. The mismatch between judicial workload and financial support available for courts has been a growing concern within the judiciary. The CJI is seeking to secure a dedicated allocation of Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000 crore for comprehensive modernisation of judicial infrastructure across the country.
- **Declining Budgetary Allocations for Judiciary:** The Ministry of Law and Justice has been allocated Rs 4,509.06 crore in the Union Budget for 2026-27, nearly Rs 400 crore lower than the previous year's allocation of Rs 4,998.24 crore. The allocation for the judiciary constitutes barely 0.08% of the total Union Budget, while the Centre's contribution to overall judicial expenditure remains limited to around 8%, leaving states to shoulder nearly 90 to 92% of the burden. Allocations under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Development of Infrastructure Facilities for the Judiciary have dropped to Rs 810 crore from Rs 998 crore in 2025-26, the lowest since 2022-23.

Puducherry Gets New Leadership as Rangasamy Takes Charge as CM

In the News: N. Rangasamy, founder of the All India N.R. Congress (AINRC) and head of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Puducherry, was sworn in as Chief Minister for a record fifth time on May 13, 2026. Lieutenant Governor K. Kailashnathan administered the oaths of office and secrecy at Lok Niwas. BJP leader A. Namassivayam and AINRC legislator Malladi Krishna Rao were also sworn in as Ministers.

Key Points:



- **Presidential Appointment and Government Formation:** President Droupadi Murmu appointed N. Rangasamy as Chief Minister, following which Lieutenant Governor K. Kailashnathan invited him to form the government. Mr. Rangasamy staked his claim by submitting letters of support from elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). In the 30-member Puducherry Assembly, the NDA secured the support of 18 MLAs, two more than the majority mark of 16.
- **Rangasamy's Political Career and Record Fifth Term:** Seventy-six-year-old N. Rangasamy has become the first leader to serve as Chief Minister of Puducherry for five terms, having earlier served from 2001 to 2006, 2006 to 2008 as a Congress leader, 2011 to 2016 and 2021 to 2026 after founding the AINRC. In the recently held Assembly elections, he was elected from both the Thattanchavady and Mangalam constituencies, winning by margins of 4,441 and 7,050 votes respectively.
- **Swearing-In Ceremony and Key Attendees:** The ceremony was held at Lok Niwas in Puducherry, with Lieutenant Governor K. Kailashnathan administering the oath. BJP National President Nitin Nabin, national general secretary (organisation) B.L. Santhosh and party in-charge Nirmal Kumar Surana attended the event. MLAs-elect from the AINRC, BJP, DMK, AIADMK, and other parties, along with Chief Secretary Sharat Chauhan and Director General of Police Shalini Singh, were also present.
- **Immediate Policy Actions After Assuming Charge:** Upon assuming charge, the Chief Minister signed files related to 17 subjects, including extension of health insurance coverage of Rs 3 lakh to Above Poverty Line (APL) families. Other key decisions included the establishment of a 'Nam Cancer Hospital' at the Indira Gandhi Government Medical College and land allotment to IIT-Madras and JIPMER. These decisions signal the new government's priorities in healthcare, education and institutional development.
- **About Puducherry as a Union Territory:** Puducherry is a Union Territory administered by the Central government through a Lieutenant Governor who acts as the representative of the President of India. Unlike most Union Territories, it has its own elected Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers headed by a Chief Minister, a feature shared with Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir. The Assembly comprises 33 seats, of which 30 are directly elected while three members are nominated by the Union government.

How Supreme Court endorsed the right to be taught in one's mother tongue

In the News: The Supreme Court of India, in a significant judgment delivered on May 13, 2026, held that the right to receive education in one's mother tongue flows from Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and expression. A Division Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta set aside the Rajasthan High Court's dismissal of a public interest litigation and directed the State of Rajasthan to recognise the Rajasthani language for educational purposes and introduce it as a subject in all government and private schools in a phased manner. The case was titled Padam Mehta and Anr. versus The State of Rajasthan and Ors., SLP(C) No. 1425/2025.

Key Points:

- **Constitutional Basis in Article 19(1)(a):** The Supreme Court held that the guarantee of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) necessarily encompasses the right to receive information in a form that is both meaningful and comprehensible. The Court observed that the true value of this freedom lies not merely in the ability to communicate but in the ability to understand, internalise and process information so as to make informed choices. It held that instruction in the mother language or a language of choice fortifies the learner's conceptual clarity, ensures deeper cognitive engagement and secures the constitutional promise of meaningful access to knowledge. The Court also referred to its earlier decision in State of Karnataka v. Associated Management of English Medium Primary and Secondary Schools (2014), where it was recognised that Article 19(1)(a) confers freedom of choice on a child regarding the medium of instruction at the primary level.
- **Constitutional and Statutory Framework for Mother Tongue Education:** The Court undertook an elaborate discussion on the historical, constitutional and pedagogical significance of mother tongue-based education, tracing its roots through Part XVII of the Constitution (Articles 343 to 351), Article 350-A inserted by the Seventh Constitutional Amendment, and Article 21-A guaranteeing the right to education. It observed that Articles 21, 21-A, 41, 45, 51-A(k) and 350-A collectively establish education as a constitutional entitlement coupled with a corresponding public duty on the State. The Court also referred to Section 29(2)(f) of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education

Act, 2009, which provides that the medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in the child's mother tongue. The D.S. Kothari Commission (1964-66), which advocated for the three-language formula and stressed that regional language should ordinarily be the medium of instruction, was also discussed.

- **National Education Policy 2020 and Pedagogical Rationale:** The Court noted that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasised the use of home language, local language or regional language as the medium of instruction up to at least Grade V and preferably till Grade VIII. It observed that the NEP 2020 reflects a considered governmental policy that education imparted in a familiar language improves conceptual clarity and long-term learning outcomes. The Court held that education delivered in a language not understood by the child cannot meaningfully qualify as quality education, as the very purpose of education is to equip the learner with knowledge, understanding and skills. It referred to *State of U.P. v. Anand Kumar Yadav* (2018) and *Devesh Sharma v. Union of India* (2023) to emphasise that the right to education necessarily means the right to quality education.
- **Criticism of State Inaction and Rajasthan's Stand:** The Court expressed serious concern that despite constitutional provisions, statutory mandates and policy declarations, there had been little effective implementation of mother tongue-based education at the ground level. It termed the stand taken by the State of Rajasthan as "myopic" and "lackadaisical," observing that the State's justification that only Eighth Schedule languages were being taught in schools amounted to an attempt to sidestep constitutional obligations.

V. D. Satheesan Named Kerala's Next Chief Minister by Indian National Congress

In the News: The All India Congress Committee (AICC) announced V.D. Satheesan as Kerala's next Chief Minister, ending 10 days of intense suspense and internal lobbying that followed the Congress-led United Democratic Front's (UDF) sweeping victory in the Kerala Assembly elections. The UDF won 102 of the 140 seats, ending the CPM-led Left Democratic Front's decade-long rule, with Congress alone securing 63 seats and its key ally, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), winning 22 seats.

Key Points:

- **UDF's Landslide Victory and Leadership Race:** The Congress-led UDF secured a thumping victory in the Kerala Assembly elections on May 4, 2026, marking a politically significant comeback after setbacks in the 2016 and 2021 elections. The victory also marked a generational shift in Kerala Congress politics after the era of leaders like K. Karunakaran, Oommen Chandy, and A.K. Antony. However, immediately after the results, attention shifted from victory celebrations to a high-stakes power struggle for the Chief Minister's post among three contenders - V.D. Satheesan, K.C. Venugopal, and Ramesh Chennithala.
- **10-Day Power Struggle and High Command Intervention:** The Congress high command appointed senior leaders Mukul Wasnik and Ajay Maken as observers to gather opinions from MLAs and alliance leaders. On May 7, the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) passed a resolution authorising party president Mallikarjun Kharge to decide the leader of the legislature party, effectively handing the final decision to Delhi. Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, and Sonia Gandhi held a series of discussions with Kerala leaders, former KPCC chiefs, MLAs, and alliance representatives before arriving at the final decision.
- **Selection of V.D. Satheesan as Chief Minister:** On May 14, AICC Kerala in-charge Deepa Dasmunsi officially announced at a press conference in New Delhi that V.D. Satheesan had been appointed leader of the Congress Legislature Party and would become Kerala's next Chief Minister. Satheesan's claim was based on his role as the Leader of Opposition who led the UDF's aggressive campaign against the LDF and became the public face of the alliance's comeback. Calling it "a new era, a new Kerala," Satheesan promised to address the state's economic challenges and debt crisis, while both K.C. Venugopal and Ramesh Chennithala publicly accepted the decision and pledged complete support.
- **Political Reactions and Criticism:** The BJP and LDF repeatedly attacked the Congress over its inability to arrive at a consensus despite securing a massive mandate, with Prime Minister Modi accusing the party of indecision and allegedly "stabbing its own leaders in the back." Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala hit back, reminding PM Modi that the BJP itself had taken nearly 50 days to decide the Delhi Chief Minister earlier in the year. The internal friction also saw posters targeting rival camps appear across districts, including warnings in Wayanad that the constituency would become "the next Amethi" if the wrong decision was taken.

- **Alliance Dynamics and Road Ahead:** The IUML, Congress's biggest ally in Kerala, publicly maintained it would accept the high command's decision, but several League leaders privately expressed concern that the prolonged indecision was sending the wrong message. CM-designate Satheesan stated he would take senior leaders K.C. Venugopal and Ramesh Chennithala into confidence and called for a "collective effort" in governance. The Congress leadership reportedly balanced multiple factors including public perception, MLA support, alliance dynamics, caste equations, organisational stability, and future leadership transition before arriving at the final decision.

India's 1st Mega Greenfield Shipyard at Thoothukudi

In the News: A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on April 20, 2026, between HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering Co., Ltd. (HD KSOE), National Shipbuilding & Heavy Industries Park, Tamil Nadu Limited (NSHIP-TN), and Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited (SMFCL) for the development of India's first Mega Greenfield Shipyard at Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, with an envisaged annual capacity of 2.5 Million Gross Tonnage (GT). The MoU was exchanged during the State Visit of South Korean President Lee Jae Myung to India, under the India-ROK Comprehensive Framework 'VOYAGES' for Partnership in Shipbuilding, Shipping and Maritime Logistics.

Key Points:

- **Tripartite Agreement and Key Partners:** The MoU was signed between HD KSOE, a global leader in shipbuilding from South Korea, NSHIP-TN, a Special Purpose Vehicle jointly promoted by V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority (VoCPA) and State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu (SIPCOT), and Sagarmala Finance Corporation Limited under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. The agreement provides a foundation for the joint development, financing, construction, and operation of a world-class mega shipyard at Thoothukudi. The Techno-Economic Feasibility Report (TEFR) has already been completed, while the Detailed Project Report (DPR) is currently underway.
- **VOYAGES Framework and India-South Korea Partnership:** The agreement emerged under the India-ROK Comprehensive Framework 'VOYAGES' (Shared Vision for Operation of Yard Assisted Growth with Efficiency and Scale) launched following the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung. The Thoothukudi Greenfield Shipyard represents one of the earliest implementation outcomes under this maritime cooperation framework. The collaboration may also facilitate training of Indian shipbuilding professionals and workers at HD KSOE's facilities in the Republic of Korea.
- **Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 and Capacity Building:** India's Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 (MAKV 2047) aims to position India among the top five shipbuilding nations globally, with a targeted shipbuilding output of 4.5 Million GT per annum by 2047. The proposed Thoothukudi facility, with a projected annual capacity of 2.5 Million GT, is expected to significantly transform India's commercial shipbuilding landscape. In September 2025, the Government of India launched a comprehensive shipbuilding policy package of approximately ₹70,000 crore aimed at accelerating India's emergence as a globally competitive shipbuilding hub.
- **Employment Generation and Industrial Ecosystem:** The project is expected to generate approximately 15,000 direct jobs upon stabilisation of operations, besides creating substantial indirect employment opportunities across Tamil Nadu and the surrounding region. The shipyard will serve as the anchor facility of the Thoothukudi Shipbuilding Cluster being developed by NSHIP-TN. The project is envisaged to catalyse the development of a comprehensive maritime industrial ecosystem through ancillary and component manufacturing clusters, localisation of marine equipment, workforce skilling initiatives, and adoption of advanced manufacturing, digital shipbuilding, and green shipping technologies.
- **Growing International Interest in Indian Shipbuilding:** Since the launch of the ₹70,000 crore shipbuilding policy package, Indian shipyards have witnessed growing international interest and order inflows, reflecting increasing confidence in the country's shipbuilding capabilities and green technology readiness. CMA CGM has placed orders for six 1,700 TEU vessels at Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL), while Swan Energy's Pipavav Shipyard has secured international orders for six chemical tankers from Norway and four ammonia-powered Kamsarmax bulk carriers from the United Kingdom.

Kalam & Kavach 3.0 Inaugurated in New Delhi

In the News: Raksha Rajya Mantri Sanjay Seth inaugurated the third edition of Kalam & Kavach at Manekshaw Centre, New Delhi on May 14, 2026. Themed "Taking JAI Forward With I²", the conference serves as a premier strategic platform to deliberate on India's evolving defence transformation, indigenous capability development, and future warfighting preparedness, centred around the strategic vision of Jointness, Aatmanirbharta and Innovation (JAI) along with Indigenisation and International Collaboration (I²).

Key Points:

- **About Kalam & Kavach 3.0 and Its Theme:** The conference brings together senior policymakers, military leadership, defence industry stakeholders, diplomats, innovators, start-ups, academia, and strategic experts on a single platform. It seeks to advance discussions on integrated military capability development, technological innovation, and strategic partnerships in line with national security objectives and the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. The twin pillars of the theme - JAI (Jointness, Aatmanirbharta and Innovation) and I² (Indigenisation and International Collaboration) - define the strategic direction of the event.
- **Key Participants and Inaugural Session:** The event witnessed participation of Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, and senior officials from the Ministry of Defence, HQ IDS, DRDO, and the National Security Advisory Board. The inaugural session featured a special address by the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC) Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit. Foreign ambassadors, defence attaches from friendly countries, global defence corporations, and Indian industry leaders also participated.
- **Key Thematic Discussions on Future Warfare:** The conference focused on future-proofing India's warfighting edge through discussions on AI-enabled warfare, autonomous systems, hypersonic technologies, and quantum-enabled Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. Emerging threats from space and low-earth orbit as well as Tri-service integration were also deliberated upon. Sessions on global partnerships examined co-development models, advanced defence manufacturing, and technology transfer frameworks.

Judicial Infrastructure Advisory Committee

In the News: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant has constituted a Judicial Infrastructure Advisory Committee on May 12, 2026, headed by Supreme Court Justice Aravind Kumar, to prepare a blueprint for the modernisation of courts across the country. The committee aims to address infrastructural deficiencies in High Courts and District Courts and secure a government allocation of ₹40,000 to ₹50,000 crore to ensure a unified infrastructural ecosystem on a pan-India basis.

Key Points:

- **Composition of the Committee:** The committee is chaired by Supreme Court Justice Aravind Kumar and comprises Justice Debansu Basak of the Calcutta High Court, Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, and Justice Somasekhar Sundaresan of the Bombay High Court. The Director General of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD), New Delhi, and the Secretary General of the Supreme Court of India are also members, with the latter serving as the Member Secretary.
- **Mandate and Reporting Structure:** The committee has been tasked with submitting its detailed findings and funding requirements to Sanjeev Sanyal, a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council, by August 31, 2026. After submission, the Chief Justice of India will take up the matter with the Government of India and the State Governments for implementation. The purpose is to ensure substantial financial support from the government to overhaul judicial infrastructure nationwide.
- **Seven Key Focus Areas:** The panel will focus on identifying systemic constraints that hinder the functioning of courts and improving facilities for litigants and lawyers across the country. It will also work on implementing cutting-edge technology to accelerate case disposal and focus on the e-courts initiative to bridge the digital divide. The construction of modern court complexes designed for the 21st century is another priority area for the committee.

Why Modi government has banned sugar exports: 3 reasons

In the News: The central government has banned sugar exports with immediate effect till September 30, 2026, or until further orders, in a move aimed at safeguarding domestic supplies and ensuring food security amid concerns over

production and availability. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued a notification on May 13, 2026, changing the export status of raw sugar, white sugar, and refined sugar under ITC (HS) Codes 1701 14 90 and 1701 99 90 from "restricted" to "prohibited".

Key Points:

- **Reason for the Ban - Ensuring Domestic Availability and Price Control:** The government's primary objective is to maintain adequate domestic sugar availability and prevent any sharp rise in retail sugar prices. India is one of the world's largest sugar producers and consumers, and by stopping exports, the Centre aims to prioritise domestic demand over overseas shipments. Although sugarcane production has risen by roughly 10 per cent compared with the previous year, growth across the sector has remained uneven, with stronger gains concentrated among mills with integrated ethanol production facilities.
- **Reason for the Ban - Production Concerns and Global Market Pressures:** India, the world's second-largest sugar producer after Brazil, had previously approved exports of around 1.59 million metric tonnes after estimating that production would comfortably exceed domestic demand. However, lower-than-expected production and rising pressure on local prices prompted the government to reconsider its position. The restrictions are expected to tighten global sugar supplies and could support international raw and white sugar prices, creating opportunities for competing exporters such as Brazil and Thailand.
- **Reason for the Ban - Food Security and Strategic Buffer:** The ban reflects the government's broader food security strategy of building a domestic buffer to insulate against price volatility and supply disruptions. The government has also retained the power to allow exports to specific countries if there is a formal request from their governments to meet food security requirements. Exports may also be permitted under the Advance Authorisation Scheme (AAS) as per the Foreign Trade Policy 2023, and shipments to the European Union and the United States under existing CXL and Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) arrangements will continue.
- **Transitional Relief for Existing Shipments:** The DGFT has provided relief for consignments that were already in the export pipeline before the notification came into effect. Exports will be allowed if loading onto vessels had already started, shipping bills had been filed and vessels had berthed or anchored at Indian ports with rotation numbers allotted, or sugar consignments had already been handed over to Customs with verifiable proof.

Rajasthan Inaugurates First Semiconductor Cluster in Bhiwadi

In the News: India's first SME-led semiconductor chip manufacturing facility by Sahasra Semiconductors Pvt Ltd was inaugurated on May 15, 2026, at Bhiwadi in Alwar district, Rajasthan. The Semiconductor ATMP/OSAT (Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging / Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test) facility, located inside the Electronics Manufacturing Cluster (EMC) at Salarpur, Khushkhara, was virtually inaugurated by Union Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in the presence of Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and Union Minister Bhupender Yadav.

Key Points:

- **Facility Details and Capacity:** The semiconductor facility has been developed under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's (MeitY) Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS) with an investment of over Rs 150 crore. Spread over 57,000 square feet, it is equipped with Class 10K and 100K cleanrooms and will package memory chips used in products such as Micro SD cards, flash storage devices, LED driver ICs, eSIMs and RFID products. The unit currently has an annual packaging capacity of 60 million semiconductor units and plans to scale up to nearly 400-600 million units annually over the next 2-3 years.
- **Electronics Manufacturing Cluster at Bhiwadi:** The EMC at Bhiwadi has been developed over 50.3 acres at a project cost of Rs 46.09 crore, with direct government support of Rs 20.24 crore under the EMC scheme, by the Electronic Industries Association of India (ELCINA). The cluster has already attracted planned investments of over Rs 1,200 crore from 20 companies operating across semiconductor packaging, electronic components, EV parts, RFID technologies and industrial electronics. Eleven companies are already operational with investments exceeding Rs 900 crore, generating employment for more than 2,700 people.
- **Export Performance and India's Electronics Growth:** More than 60% of the Bhiwadi facility's production is already being exported to markets including the United States, Germany, France, Eastern Europe, China and Nepal. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted the rapid growth of India's electronics sector over the past 12 years, noting that

production has grown six times to nearly Rs 13 lakh crore while exports have risen to around Rs 4.24 lakh crore. He also stated that mobile phones have now become India's top export commodity, describing the inauguration as a historic day for Rajasthan's entry into the strategically critical semiconductor industry.

- **Rajasthan Semiconductor Policy:** Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma informed that the state government introduced a Rajasthan Semiconductor Policy in March 2026, aimed at developing a semiconductor ecosystem in the state and supporting manufacturing activity in the Delhi-NCR-linked industrial belt. Semiconductor policies in India generally cover land support, capital incentives, skill development and infrastructure for chip-related industries. The state is working to develop the region near Delhi-NCR into a manufacturing hub, leveraging Bhiwadi's strategic location in Alwar district.
- **Understanding ATMP/OSAT in the Semiconductor Value Chain:** ATMP (Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging) and OSAT (Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test) units form part of the downstream semiconductor manufacturing chain, handling chip assembly after wafer fabrication and performing final testing and packaging before distribution. These units are distinct from wafer fabrication plants and are a critical component of the semiconductor value chain.

Article 25 and Gender Equality

In the News: The Indian government told a nine-judge Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant that Article 25(1) of the Constitution protects freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, but does not itself deal with gender equality. The matter was heard over 16 days across five weeks, raising fundamental questions about the intersection of religious freedom and gender-based discrimination under the Constitution.

Key Points:

- **Article 25 of the Constitution:** Article 25(1) is part of Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Constitution of India and guarantees all persons the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health. Article 25(2) permits the State to regulate or restrict any economic, financial, political or other secular activity associated with religious practice and to provide for social welfare and reform, including the opening of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus. Explanation II clarifies that the reference to Hindus in Article 25(2)(b) includes persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion.
- **Government's Argument on Religious Denominations and Gender:** The Centre argued before the nine-judge bench that religious denominations may prescribe different modes of worship, beliefs and rituals for men and women under Article 25(1), placing emphasis on denominational autonomy, which is a recognised constitutional concept in Indian religious freedom jurisprudence. The government's position was that Article 25(1) protects the freedom to practise religion but does not by itself address gender equality. The Solicitor General also referred to the Sabarimala case while cautioning against repeated judicial intervention in religious matters, arguing that changes in religious practices should be decided by lawmakers through legislative deliberation.
- **Equality Provisions Under the Constitution:** Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution separately address the issue of discrimination and equality. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, while Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. The constitutional debate before the nine-judge bench essentially centred on how these equality provisions interact with the religious freedom guaranteed under Article 25, and whether gender-based restrictions in religious practices can be constitutionally sustained.
- **Key Judicial Precedents on Article 25:** The Supreme Court has dealt with the scope of Article 25 in several landmark cases. In *Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras v. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Sri Shirur Mutt* (1954), the Court held that while the State can regulate administration of religious institutions, it should not interfere with essential religious practices unless they are socially harmful or against public order. In *Shayara Bano v. Union of India* (Triple Talaq case), a five-judge bench by a 3:2 majority ruled the practice of Talaq-e-biddat (triple talaq) as illegal and unconstitutional. In the *Anand Marga* case (1984), the Court held that Tandava dance was not an essential part of the religion and its prohibition in public did not violate Articles 25 and 26.

Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025

In the News: The National Statistical Office (NSO) released the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Annual Report 2025, covering the period January to December 2025. This is the first comprehensive PLFS report based on the calendar year cycle, replacing the earlier July-June agricultural year cycle, in line with international practice. The survey covered approximately 2,70,472 households and 11,48,634 persons across rural and urban India, with a significantly expanded sample size compared to previous years.

Key Points:

- **Labour Force Participation and Employment Stability:** The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for persons aged 15 years and above remained stable at 59.3% during 2025, with male and female LFPR standing at 79.1% and 40.0% respectively. The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) was estimated at 57.4%, remaining almost at the same level as in 2024. On average, 61.6 crore persons aged 15 years and above were employed in the country during 2025, of which 41.6 crore were male and 20.0 crore were female, using projected population figures from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- **Declining Unemployment Rates:** The overall Unemployment Rate (UR) for persons aged 15 years and above stood at 3.1% for both males and females in 2025, with male UR showing a marginal decline from 3.3% in 2024. Youth (15-29 years) unemployment declined to 9.9% in 2025 from 10.3% in 2024, with rural youth unemployment falling to 8.3% from 8.7% and urban youth unemployment dropping to 13.6% from 14.3%. Unemployment among educated persons (secondary and above) also reduced to 6.5% in 2025 from 7.0% in 2024.
- **Shift in Employment Composition:** The share of self-employed workers showed a gradual decline from 58.2% in 2023 to 57.5% in 2024 and further to 56.2% in 2025, accompanied by an increase in regular wage/salaried employment from 22.4% to 23.6%. Sectorally, agriculture's share in employment decreased from 44.8% in 2024 to 43.0% in 2025, while manufacturing improved from 11.6% to 12.1% and other services rose from 12.2% to 13.1%. The share of casual labour remained broadly stable at around one-fifth of total employment.
- **Women's Earnings Growth:** Earnings of female workers showed notable improvement across all employment categories in nominal terms. In self-employment, female earnings grew by approximately 8.8% (from Rs 5,861 to Rs 6,374), outpacing male earnings growth of 6.0%. In regular wage/salaried employment, female earnings rose by about 7.2% (from Rs 17,126 to Rs 18,353), compared to 5.8% growth for males. For casual labour, female earnings improved by about 5.4% (from Rs 299 to Rs 315), while male earnings remained nearly stable.

Graphs, Data and Perspectives: Why the latest crude oil price spike will test the Indian economy

In the News: The recent escalation of the West Asia crisis, triggered by the US war in Iran, has pushed crude oil prices sharply higher, with the Indian basket of crude oil reaching \$115 per barrel in April 2026 and \$106 in May 2026. The government has responded by hiking fuel prices across the country, raising concerns about the wider impact on the Indian economy, household budgets and government finances.

Key Points:

- **End of a Decade-Long Low-Price Era:** When PM Modi came to power in 2014, global crude oil prices began falling sharply from the \$106 to \$114 per barrel range seen during the last years of UPA-2 (2011-14). For over a decade, the Indian basket of crude never touched \$100 a barrel, allowing the government fiscal breathing room. That streak has now ended, with prices crossing \$100 again in the first two months of FY 2026-27, marking a roughly 40% increase over the previous year's cost.
- **Impact on Inflation and Retail Fuel Prices:** Historical data shows that even when crude oil prices crashed, retail prices of petrol and diesel often continued to rise, including during the Covid year of 2020-21 when crude fell by 30%. Wholesale inflation is more sensitive to fuel price changes due to its higher weightage in the index. Retail inflation, which directly affects consumers, has consistently remained above the RBI's target rate of 4%, particularly in the four-year stretch beginning from the Covid period.
- **Pressure on Economic Growth:** Higher crude oil prices have historically been detrimental to India's real GDP growth. When crude was in the mid-\$40s per barrel during 2015-16 and 2016-17, India recorded growth rates of 8% and above.

In contrast, during the UPA-2 years when oil crossed \$100, growth struggled between 5% and 6%. A sustained return to the \$100 level could similarly weigh on growth in the current fiscal year.

- **Widening Trade Deficit and Rupee Depreciation:** India's dependence on crude oil imports has only grown over the past 12 years, meaning higher prices directly worsen the trade deficit. In the past 15 years, the rupee appreciated against the dollar in only two years, both times when crude was below \$50. The sharp depreciation of the rupee in the past year reflects the fact that India's trade balance weakness has not been offset by surpluses elsewhere in its Balance of Payments.
- **Strain on Government Finances:** Higher crude oil prices tend to widen the fiscal deficit, as the government either absorbs the cost through subsidies and borrowing or passes it on to consumers. Notably, even during the years of low oil prices, the NDA government never achieved the FRBM Act target of a fiscal deficit at 3% of GDP. With oil now back above \$100, fiscal management is expected to face even greater strain going forward.

Women Empowerment Boost as Project Saksham Expands Across India

In the News: The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), in partnership with Vertis Foundation, highlighted the progress of "Project Saksham," a women-focused skill development initiative aimed at empowering rural women and underserved youth through structured vocational training and sustainable livelihood opportunities. The initiative operates through 12 training centres across India and has trained over 6,000 youth, with more than 4,000 successfully placed in employment across various sectors. Over 80 per cent of the beneficiaries are women, underscoring the programme's strong emphasis on gender-led empowerment.

Key Points:

- **About Project Saksham and Its Objectives:** Project Saksham is a skill development initiative launched by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) in partnership with the Vertis Foundation, focused on empowering rural women through industry-relevant vocational training for sustainable livelihood opportunities. The initiative is anchored in NHAI's broader vision of inclusive infrastructure development, built on the belief that communities residing along national highways, particularly rural women, should directly benefit from the economic opportunities generated by infrastructure expansion. Beyond skilling, the programme aims to create pathways for long-term financial independence and social empowerment, bridging the gap between physical connectivity provided by highways and the economic inclusion of communities that are often left out of the growth generated by large infrastructure projects.
- **Training Network and Employment Outcomes:** Project Saksham currently operates through a network of 12 training centres spread across the country, providing underserved communities with access to industry-relevant skills and pathways into the formal workforce. To date, the initiative has trained over 6,000 youth, of whom more than 4,000 have been successfully placed across various sectors. Beneficiaries placed through the programme are earning average monthly incomes in the range of Rs 13,000 to Rs 16,000, which often surpasses entry-level wage benchmarks in several states. Notably, women constitute more than 80 per cent of the total beneficiaries, reflecting the programme's strong emphasis on gender-led empowerment and economic inclusion of women in the formal economy.
- **Vocational Training and Skill Areas:** Participants under Project Saksham are trained in a diverse range of vocational skills designed to enhance their employability in both formal and semi-formal sectors. The training disciplines include electrical work, plumbing, appliance repair, tailoring, general duty assistant nursing and multi-skill technician programmes.

India Concludes Kimberley Process Intersessional 2026 in Mumbai Under Its Chairship

In the News: The Kimberley Process (KP) Intersessional Meeting 2026 concluded in Mumbai after four days of deliberations under India's Chairship. The meeting brought together representatives from KP Participants, Observers, industry stakeholders and civil society organisations to discuss the future of the natural diamond sector. India's Chairship theme for 2026 centres on the 3Cs - Credibility, Compliance and Consumer Confidence - aimed at strengthening trust, transparency and cooperation within the Kimberley Process framework.

Key Points:

- **India's Chairship and the 3Cs Agenda:** India is chairing the Kimberley Process in 2026 with a focused theme of the 3Cs - Credibility, Compliance and Consumer Confidence. Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal reaffirmed India's commitment to advancing this agenda and to working with all Participants and stakeholders to strengthen the relevance of the Kimberley Process in a rapidly evolving global marketplace. He highlighted that India, as the world's leading centre for diamond cutting and polishing, recognises the vital role of the KP in ensuring that natural diamonds remain a symbol of trust, responsibility and shared prosperity. He further noted that the natural diamond sector sustains millions of livelihoods across producing, processing and consuming nations.
- **Deliberations and Working Group Discussions:** During the four-day Intersessional in Mumbai, Working Groups and Committees held detailed discussions on monitoring systems, technical processes, governance reforms, statistical reporting and artisanal production. There was a sustained focus on strengthening transparency, improving operational mechanisms and reinforcing trust across the natural diamond value chain. KP Chair 2026 Suchindra Misra stated that the progress achieved during the Mumbai Intersessional reflected the shared commitment of Participants and Observers towards keeping the Kimberley Process credible, relevant and responsive to the evolving dynamics of global diamond trade and consumer expectations. Discussions also covered sustainability requirements and digital verification in the supply chain.
- **Communication, Outreach and Industry Perspective:** The Intersessional highlighted the importance of enhancing communication and outreach efforts to better convey the positive impact of the Kimberley Process to end consumers, including responsible sourcing practices, development outcomes and livelihood support across producing nations and communities. Kirit Bhansali, Chairman of the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council, stated that discussions on compliance mechanisms, artisanal production and supply chain transparency were important to ensuring that the KP remains aligned with changing market expectations. He further observed that natural diamonds represent a sustainable product and livelihood for millions and that the Kimberley Process continues to be one of the most progressive certification systems globally.
- **About the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme:** The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) was established under United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/56 of the year 2000. It is a global initiative aimed at preventing conflict diamonds from entering legitimate trade and promoting responsible sourcing across the natural diamond supply chain. The KP operates through a unique tripartite structure and consensus-based approach, bringing together governments, industry and civil society, which continues to be one of its key strengths. The discussions from the Mumbai Intersessional will carry forward into the KP Plenary scheduled to be held in New Delhi later in 2026 under India's continued Chairship.

Captagon Seized in India Under Operation Ragepill

In the News: Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced that Indian agencies had achieved the first-ever seizure of Captagon in the country through "Operation Ragepill," conducted by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). The operation resulted in the seizure of 227.7 kg of Captagon worth approximately Rs 182 crore and the arrest of a Syrian national named Alabras Ahmad, who was part of an international drug trafficking syndicate using India as a transit route to smuggle the contraband to West Asian countries, particularly Saudi Arabia.

Key Points:

- **Operation Ragepill and the Seizure:** The Narcotics Control Bureau launched Operation Ragepill after receiving intelligence inputs from a foreign drug law enforcement agency about India being used as a transit point for trafficking Captagon. Acting on this information, the NCB raided a house in Delhi's Neb Sarai on May 11, 2026, and seized approximately 31.5 kg of Captagon in tablet form concealed inside a commercial chapati-cutting machine that was intended to be exported to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Subsequent questioning of the arrested Syrian national, Alabras Ahmad, led to a further seizure of over 196 kg of Captagon powder from a container at the Container Facilitation Station (CFS) at Mundra in Gujarat on May 14, 2026. The container had been imported from Syria with sheep wool as the declared consignment.
- **The Arrested Accused and the Trafficking Network:** The arrested Syrian national, Alabras Ahmad, had entered India on a tourist visa on November 15, 2024, but his visa had expired on January 12, 2025, and he had been illegally overstaying in the country. He had rented the house in Neb Sarai, Delhi, which was used as a storage and transit point

for the contraband. Initial findings suggested that the seized Captagon was to be sent to Saudi Arabia and its neighbouring countries in West Asia, where Captagon abuse has emerged as a serious law enforcement and public health concern in recent decades. The NCB has initiated a comprehensive investigation to identify the source of procurement, financial and hawala linkages, logistics facilitators, international receivers and the wider transnational network associated with the syndicate.

- **What is Captagon:** Captagon is the common street name historically associated with Fenethylamine, a synthetic amphetamine-type stimulant originally developed in the 1960s for the medical treatment of attention disorders and narcolepsy. Owing to its addictive properties and abuse potential, the original pharmaceutical formulation was eventually prohibited internationally. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Captagon provides a boost of energy, enhances focus, helps a person stay awake for long periods and produces a feeling of euphoria. The drug has frequently been referred to in international media and security discourse as the "Jihadi Drug" due to repeated allegations and intelligence inputs linking its abuse and trafficking with extremist and conflict-zone networks operating in parts of West Asia, and it was reportedly also used by ISIS fighters.
- **Government's Anti-Drug Stance:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah congratulated the NCB for the breakthrough and reiterated the government's commitment to a "Drug-Free India." He stated that the busting of the drug consignment destined for the Middle East and the arrest of a foreign national stand as examples of the government's zero tolerance policy against drugs. He further emphasized that the government will clamp down on every gram of drugs entering India or leaving the country using Indian territory as a transit route. The operation was described as an example of how international intelligence sharing and law enforcement cooperation play a critical role in identifying, intercepting and dismantling transnational narcotics trafficking networks operating across multiple jurisdictions.

INTERNATIONAL

US Proposes Higher Minimum Wages for H-1B Workers

In the News: The United States Department of Labor issued a proposed rule titled "Improving Wage Protections for the Temporary and Permanent Employment of Certain Foreign Nationals in the United States," seeking a sharp 30% hike in minimum wages under the H-1B visa programme and three related labour certification programmes — H-1B1, E-3, and Programme Electronic Review Management (PERM). The proposal, open for public comments until May 26, 2026, aims to prevent foreigners from undercutting salaries of United States (US) nationals and follows a Presidential Proclamation issued on September 19, 2025, directing the Department of Labor to revise prevailing wage levels under the H-1B programme.

Key Points:

- **Proposed Wage Hike:** The United States has proposed to increase the minimum wages paid to hire employees under the H-1B visa programme by approximately 30% over the previously fixed limits, citing the need to protect United States workers from wage undercutting.
- **Programmes Covered:** The proposed changes will affect four labour certification programmes — H-1B, H-1B1, E-3, and Programme Electronic Review Management (PERM) — used to hire and sponsor foreign workers in the United States.
- **Four Experience Levels:** The proposal seeks to raise prevailing wage floors across four experience levels. Level I (entry-level) would move from the 17th percentile to the 34th percentile of wage data, while Level IV (most experienced) would move from the 67th percentile to the 88th percentile of wage data.
- **City-Wise Variation:** The prevailing wages differ from city to city. For an entry-level software engineer, the minimum H-1B salary would rise to about USD 162,000 a year in San Francisco, about USD 132,000 in New York, and about USD 113,000 in Dallas.
- **Public Consultation Window:** The proposed rule is open for public comments until May 26, 2026, after which the United States Department of Labor will examine the responses and notify the final rule.
- **About H-1B Visa:** The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant work visa used by the United States for speciality occupations requiring theoretical or technical expertise in fields such as Information Technology (IT), engineering, and research.



- **Prevailing Wage Rules:** Prevailing wage rules are used in the United States to set minimum pay standards for certain foreign workers in relation to local labour-market data, ensuring parity with similarly employed US nationals.
- **H-1B1 and E-3 Visas:** The H-1B1 visa applies to nationals of Chile and Singapore under separate United States visa arrangements, while the E-3 visa is reserved for Australian nationals in speciality occupations.
- **PERM Programme:** The Programme Electronic Review Management (PERM) labour certification process is part of the United States employment-based permanent residence (Green Card) system used by employers to sponsor foreign workers for permanent residency.
- **Cost Estimate:** Analysts estimate that the proposal could cost employers at least USD 18 billion in the first 12 months, with the estimated annual cost potentially rising to USD 43 billion within three years if most existing H-1B visas are renewed at higher wage levels.

Kuljeet Kaur Marhas Becomes First Indian Woman Fellow

In the News: Professor Kuljeet Kaur Marhas of the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad, was elected a Fellow of The Meteoritical Society for 2026, becoming the first Indian woman to receive this prestigious international honour in meteoritics and planetary science. In the 93-year history of the society, she is only the third Indian scientist to be conferred this recognition, after noted scientists Devendra Lal and J.N. Goswami. The honour highlights her pioneering work on extraterrestrial materials and India's growing role in global planetary science research.

Key Points:

- **Historic First:** Professor Kuljeet Kaur Marhas became the first Indian woman to be elected as a Fellow of The Meteoritical Society, one of the highest recognitions in the field of meteoritics and planetary science.
- **Date and Institution:** She was elected as a Fellow for 2026 on May 9, 2026, and is affiliated with the Planetary Science Division of the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad.
- **Only Third Indian Scientist:** In the 93-year history of The Meteoritical Society (founded in 1933), Professor Marhas is only the third Indian scientist to receive this honour, following Devendra Lal and J.N. Goswami.
- **About The Meteoritical Society:** Founded in 1933, The Meteoritical Society is an international scientific body associated with meteorites, planetary materials, and Solar System research. Its Fellows are selected from scientists recognised for major contributions to planetary materials and related laboratory studies.
- **Work on Space Mission Samples:** She has analysed samples brought back by major international space missions, including National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Stardust mission, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's (JAXA) Hayabusa mission, and NASA's Apollo programme.
- **Earlier Recognitions:** Apart from this latest honour, Professor Marhas is also a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) and a recipient of the Devendra Lal Memorial Medal for her contributions to planetary science and cosmochemistry.
- **About PRL:** The Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad, often called the cradle of space sciences in India, is a premier research institute under the Department of Space, Government of India, and is known for its leading work in astronomy, planetary sciences, and space exploration.

How India's UAE gold trade deal may have made its import bill concerns worse

In the News: Amid the ongoing West Asia crisis, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on May 11, 2026 urged citizens to reduce consumption of petroleum products, avoid non-essential foreign travel and gold purchases for a year to conserve foreign exchange reserves. Experts have pointed out that concessions given to the UAE (United Arab Emirates) for gold imports under a bilateral trade deal have inadvertently inflated India's import bill, worsening macroeconomic vulnerabilities at a time of rising crude oil prices and a weakening rupee.

Key Points:

- **PM's Austerity Appeal and Rupee Pressure:** Prime Minister Modi asked citizens to adopt measures such as reviving COVID-era work-from-home arrangements and voluntarily stopping gold purchases for a year to conserve foreign exchange reserves. The Indian rupee slipped to a record low of 95.63 against the US dollar as crude oil prices remained above 100 dollars a barrel due to a standstill in traffic via the Strait of Hormuz. Oil prices have surged nearly 50 per cent

since before the Iran war, and a similar appeal was made in 2013 by then Finance Minister P. Chidambaram during the rupee turmoil following the "taper tantrum."

- **Rising Gold Import Bill and Structural Dependency:** India's gold imports in FY26 jumped by nearly 25 per cent to 71.97 billion dollars compared to 58 billion dollars in FY25, according to data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry. In volume terms, gold imports actually fell to 721.04 tonnes from 757.09 tonnes, indicating the surge was driven by a more than 40 per cent rise in gold prices.
- **UAE Trade Deal and Refining Concerns:** The IIM Ahmedabad paper noted that the India-UAE trade deal inadvertently incentivised bullion imports over dore (semi-pure alloy of gold and silver created at mine sites) by creating a more favourable tariff structure for finished bullion, inverting the intended duty differential. A NITI Aayog report found that India has only one LBMA (London Bullion Market Association) accredited refinery compared to Japan's 11, and while the number of Indian refineries increased from fewer than five in 2013 to about 33, most remain small operations under 50 tonnes annually. Countries like Switzerland refine an estimated 70 per cent of the world's gold, leveraging refining infrastructure to generate approximately 40 per cent value addition and neutralise trade deficit concerns.
- **Alternative Sources and Macroeconomic Impact:** Certain countries such as Argentina, Peru and the Dominican Republic supply gold at below-average import costs, but they collectively represent only 15 per cent of India's total gold imports, while imports of gold ores and concentrates are increasing primarily from Colombia. India's heavy reliance on imported gold, close to 750 tonnes every year with negligible export offsets, has repeatedly emerged as a macroeconomic concern during external shocks.

Trump-Xi Summit: Iran War, Trade, Taiwan and AI on the Agenda, Why China Has the Upper Hand

In the News: United States President Donald Trump arrived in China for a three-day state visit spanning May 13-15, marking the first visit to China by a sitting American president since Trump's own 2017 trip during his previous term. The summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping carries a broad agenda covering the Iran conflict, trade relations, Taiwan and artificial intelligence cooperation.

Key Points:

- **Summit Significance:** This is the seventh in-person meeting between President Trump and President Xi Jinping, originally scheduled for April but delayed by a month. The visit includes bilateral talks, a state banquet and a visit to the Temple of Heaven. Trump is accompanied by over a dozen American CEOs including Apple's Tim Cook, Boeing chief Kelly Ortberg, Tesla's Elon Musk.
- **Iran War and China's Mediating Role:** The ongoing conflict in Iran and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz have become central to the summit, with China alongside Pakistan wading in as a mediator. China accounted for over 85 per cent of Iran's oil exports before the conflict, importing over one million barrels per day. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Beijing ahead of the summit, signalling the diplomatic clout China wields in West Asia.
- **Trade and AI Agenda:** Beijing could indicate willingness to purchase Boeing aircraft and American soybeans, while the establishment of a proposed "Board of Trade" and a parallel "Board of Investment" has reportedly been discussed in previous official-level talks. Competition in AI (Artificial Intelligence) is also a key agenda item, with both sides reportedly considering an AI safety dialogue. Nvidia's H200 chips, not yet sold to China, remain a contentious issue between the two sides.
- **Taiwan and China's Strategic Position:** Rising tensions across the Taiwan Strait remain a flashpoint after the United States announced an 11-billion-dollar arms deal with Taiwan in December 2025, though Trump has since downplayed Washington's willingness to defend Taiwan. Experts note that China has an upper hand heading into the summit, feeling confident enough to stand up to Trump on sanctions, technology controls and critical minerals.
- **Implications for India:** From the perspective of Indian policymakers, any bilateral deal between the United States and China, especially involving concessional tariffs, could serve as a baseline scenario for the revised trade deal currently under negotiation between Washington and New Delhi. The outcome of the summit is being closely watched as it could set benchmarks influencing the terms of India's own trade engagement with the United States.

Pakistan Explores Islamic NATO Defence Cooperation

In the News: Pakistan has indicated that Qatar and Turkiye could soon join its existing Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement with Saudi Arabia, signalling a possible expansion of a regional security bloc amid growing instability in West Asia. Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif stated that discussions on the arrangement were ongoing and could eventually evolve into a broader regional security and economic framework. The proposed expansion has revived discussions around the idea of an "Islamic NATO," a term used to describe a potential military alliance among major Muslim-majority countries.

Key Points:

- **Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement:** Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in September 2025 during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Riyadh. Under the agreement, any aggression against one country would be treated as an aggression against the other, formalising long-standing defence cooperation between the two nations. Saudi Arabia also provided 3 billion US dollars in financial support to Pakistan on April 15, 2026, to address a financing gap. The two countries have further strengthened military coordination in recent months, with a Pakistani military contingent arriving at King Abdulaziz Air Base in Saudi Arabia as part of joint military and regional security efforts.
- **Proposed Expansion to Qatar and Turkiye:** Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, speaking during an interview with Pakistani television channel Hum News, described the possible inclusion of Qatar and Turkiye as a "welcome development" and stated that the agreement was "being finalised." Turkiye, which is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and possesses one of the largest armed forces in the alliance, has a significant defence industry and a long record of military modernisation. Qatar has been part of several regional security discussions in West Asia, and the idea of an Islamic NATO gained renewed attention after a 2025 Israeli strike on Doha raised questions about deterrence and the security of Gulf states.
- **India's Response and Strategic Implications:** India has reacted cautiously to the Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defence agreement. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that New Delhi was aware of the development and would closely study its implications for India's national security as well as regional and global stability.
- **About NATO and Key Facts:** The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is a military alliance that was formed in 1949 and is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. The term "Islamic NATO" has been used to describe proposals for a collective security arrangement among Muslim-majority nations, though such a formal alliance has not materialised to date. Turkiye is the only Muslim-majority country that is a full member of NATO and maintains one of the largest standing armed forces in the alliance.

India Plans ₹40,000 Crore Subsea Gas Pipeline from Oman to Gujarat

In the News: India's petroleum ministry is directing GAIL, Engineers India Limited, and Indian Oil Corporation to prepare a detailed feasibility report for a ₹40,000 crore (\$4.7-4.8 billion) deep-sea gas pipeline from Oman to Gujarat, which would bypass the Strait of Hormuz entirely. The decision comes in the wake of the Hormuz crisis triggered by the US-Iran conflict in early 2026, which has cost India's oil marketing companies nearly ₹1.98 lakh crore in under-recoveries in the first quarter of 2026 alone, with daily losses of ₹1,600-1,700 crore.

Key Points:

- **Project Details and Timeline:** The proposed subsea pipeline would stretch approximately 2,000 km from Oman to Gujarat through the Arabian Sea, crossing deepwater zones exceeding 3,000 metres at the Murray Ridge. The project is estimated to take five to seven years to build from the date of clearance, with the earliest first gas expected between 2033 and 2035. The current route design avoids Pakistani continental shelf waters, which had blocked an earlier version of the project proposed in 1999.
- **The Hormuz Crisis and India's Vulnerability:** The project was revived after Iran formally closed the Strait of Hormuz on March 4, 2026, following coordinated US-Israel airstrikes on Iranian military installations. India imports roughly half its total natural gas as LNG and 88 per cent of its crude oil moved through Hormuz-dependent routes. India has no strategic gas buffer, and its strategic crude reserves cover only around 5 days of actual demand, making the country highly exposed to any disruption in the strait.

- **India's Gas Infrastructure Gap:** India operates only about 16,848 km of gas pipelines compared to China's 90,000-plus km network, a gap the ministry has framed as a national competitiveness deficit. India's gas share in the energy mix stands at around 6 per cent, compared to China's 9 per cent and the global average of above 23 per cent. GAIL, which controls over 70 per cent of India's gas transmission and marketing market share, has been mandated to lead the feasibility study and would operate the pipeline if built.
- **Private Sector Parallel - SAGE MEIDP Project:** South Asia Gas Enterprise (SAGE), a private consortium promoted by the Siddho Mal Group in joint venture with a UK-based deepwater technology company, has been advancing a nearly identical project called the Middle East-India Deepwater Pipeline (MEIDP). SAGE has already completed both technical and financial feasibility studies, with a proposed capacity of 31 mmscmd and a pipeline tariff of \$2-2.25 per MMBtu. An ASSOCHAM study found the pipeline could save India approximately \$1 billion (around ₹7,000 crore) annually compared to LNG import costs.
- **Financial Impact of the Hormuz Crisis on India:** Oil marketing companies - Indian Oil Corporation, BPCL, and HPCL - posted ₹62,500 crore in under-recoveries in the six-week window between mid-March and end-April 2026. Rating agency ICRA has warned that if crude prices remain near \$120-125 per barrel, LPG under-recoveries alone could touch ₹80,000 crore in FY27. New Delhi held retail fuel prices flat throughout the crisis, absorbing the shock fiscally rather than passing it to consumers, at an excise duty cut cost of ₹14,000 crore per month to the government.

Uber Partners with Adani Group for First Data Centre in India

In the News: Ride-hailing giant Uber has partnered with Adani Group to establish its first data centre in India, marking a major step in expanding the company's technology and AI infrastructure operations in the country. Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi announced the development after meeting Gautam Adani in Ahmedabad on May 14, 2026, stating that the facility is expected to become operational later this year and will help Uber build at scale from India for the world.

Key Points:

- **Partnership Announcement and Purpose:** Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi revealed the plans via a post on X after meeting Adani Group founder Gautam Adani in Ahmedabad. The data centre will be used to test and deploy Uber's technology and AI capabilities from India. Khosrowshahi described India as a fast-emerging leading innovation hub for Uber, with the facility expected to be ready later in 2026.
- **Uber's Growing Commitment to India:** Prior to the announcement, Khosrowshahi met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to discuss Uber's long-term expansion strategy and its alignment with India's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' vision. He revealed that the number of earners using Uber's platform in India has quadrupled since his previous meeting with the finance minister in 2022. During his five-day India visit, the Uber chief also met NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant to discuss India's evolving digital economy and innovation landscape.
- **Uber's Shift in Infrastructure Strategy:** Previously, Uber housed around 95 per cent of its IT operations in its own data centres, including a Colorado facility purchased from Microsoft in 2015. However, in 2023, the company signed two seven-year cloud deals with Google and Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI) and closed its own data centres. The India data centre marks a notable return to physical infrastructure, alongside its April 2026 agreement to adopt Amazon Web Services' custom Graviton and Trainium chips.

Adani Group's Data Centre Ambitions: Adani Group has announced plans to invest \$100 billion in renewable-energy-powered hyperscale AI-ready data centres by 2035 through its AdaniConneX venture. The conglomerate currently has around 2GW of data centre capacity and is targeting 5GW, including a gigawatt-scale campus with Google in Visakhapatnam. AdaniConneX raised \$1.44 billion last year to fund its growth plans, with additional campuses planned in Noida, Hyderabad, and Pune.

European Union Clears India for Continued Marine Product Exports

In the News: The European Union (EU) included India in its revised draft list published on May 12, 2026, for the continued export of aquaculture products to the European market beyond September 2026. The move addresses concerns that arose after India was omitted from the earlier Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/2598 issued in October 2024, which had excluded India from the list of third countries authorised to export animal-origin products for human consumption to the EU.

Key Points:

- **Background of the Issue and Regulatory Compliance:** The earlier EU regulation issued in October 2024 had not included India among third countries authorised to export products of animal origin intended for human consumption to the EU from September 2026. The revised draft list follows compliance measures undertaken by India in line with the European Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/905, which requires exporting countries to ensure that animals and animal products exported to the EU are free from the use of antimicrobial medicinal products for growth promotion and antimicrobials reserved for human treatment. India's proposed inclusion reflects the EU's confidence in the country's regulatory systems, residue monitoring mechanisms and food safety standards.
- **Significance for India's Seafood Export Sector:** The EU is one of the most important destinations for Indian seafood exports. During 2025-26, the EU emerged as India's third-largest seafood export market, accounting for 18.94% of the country's total seafood export value, worth approximately US\$ 1.593 billion. Exports to the EU recorded a sharp increase of 41.45% in value terms and 38.29% in quantity compared to 2024-25. Farmed shrimp continued to constitute the major share of India's seafood exports to the European region.
- **Role of Indian Regulatory Agencies:** The development recognises sustained efforts undertaken by the Department of Commerce through organisations such as the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and the Export Inspection Council (EIC) to strengthen regulatory compliance and promote responsible aquaculture practices. Initiatives including the National Residue Control Programme (NRCP), Post Harvest Testing Programme and rigorous testing and surveillance systems for banned antibiotics and pharmacologically active substances have significantly strengthened India's food safety and residue monitoring framework. Stakeholder training and awareness programmes have also been intensified to ensure adherence to international food safety standards.
- **India's Strengthened Food Safety Framework:** India has consistently enhanced its systems relating to veterinary medicinal products, antimicrobial residue monitoring, traceability and quality assurance in aquaculture production and seafood processing. The European Commission, in its press communication dated May 12, 2026, stated that the updated list includes countries that have demonstrated compliance with EU restrictions on antimicrobial use in food-producing animals and have provided the necessary guarantees and assurances under EU regulations. Once formally adopted by the European Commission, the revised regulation is expected to ensure uninterrupted export of Indian aquaculture products to the EU market beyond September 2026.

Afghanistan Signs \$46 Million Deal with Indian Company for Customs Infrastructure

In the News: The Taliban's Afghanistan Standards and Quality Authority signed a \$46.3 million contract with Indian company TCRC on May 13, 2026, to build and equip advanced laboratory complexes at Afghanistan's main border crossings and in Kabul. The five-year agreement was signed during a ceremony attended by Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban deputy prime minister for economic affairs, marking a notable development in India-Afghanistan economic engagement.

Key Points:

- **Scope of the Agreement:** The five-year contract covers the construction and equipping of laboratory facilities in Kabul and at nine border customs ports across Afghanistan. The laboratories will focus on testing construction materials, electrical equipment and products related to textiles, leather and paper. The project also includes the supply and installation of advanced laboratory equipment, rehabilitation of existing testing systems and efforts to obtain internationally recognised certifications from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).
- **Capacity Building and Training:** Under the agreement, foreign specialists will be introduced to help improve the professional capacity of staff at Afghanistan's Standards and Quality Authority. Technical personnel from the authority are expected to receive both domestic and international training programmes. Faizullah Tamim, the Taliban's head of the standards authority, described the agreement as an important step toward improving product quality control, supporting domestic production and preventing the import of substandard goods into Afghanistan.
- **Context of Afghanistan's Border Situation:** The deal comes at a time when border crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan have remained closed following border clashes between Taliban and Pakistani forces. The World Food Programme (WFP) has stated that the continued border closures have contributed to rising food prices and increased pressure on Afghan families. The establishment of customs laboratory infrastructure assumes added significance in this context, as Afghanistan seeks to strengthen its trade and quality assurance mechanisms amid regional instability.

- **Transparency Concerns:** Over the past five years, the Taliban have signed several similar contracts with foreign companies in different sectors, but the group usually publishes only the signing announcements and provides little transparency about implementation, progress or the final outcome of the projects. Taliban opponents accuse the group of secrecy in managing financial resources, arguing that the lack of transparency around contracts, budgets and revenues creates opportunities for misuse. Critics also note that it remains unclear how Taliban revenues, including income from mines and natural resources, are being spent.

India's Passport Ranked 78th in Henley Passport Index 2026

In the News: According to the latest edition of the Henley Passport Index, India has slipped three places to 78th position in May 2026, down from 75th in February this year. Despite the drop in ranking, Indian passport holders continue to enjoy visa-free, visa-on-arrival and electronic travel authorisation (ETA) access to 56 destinations worldwide, with no loss of access to any previously available country.

Key Points:

- **About the Henley Passport Index:** The Henley Passport Index is one of the world's most widely referenced passport rankings, published by Henley & Partners. It evaluates passports based on the number of destinations their holders can access without applying for a visa before departure. The ranking is compiled using data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and reflects changes in visa agreements, diplomatic relations and international travel policies. In 2026, the index covers 199 passports and 227 travel destinations worldwide.
- **Reason for India's Ranking Drop:** India's decline from 75th to 78th position does not indicate that Indian travellers have lost access to any countries. The drop mainly reflects shifts in global rankings as other countries improved their visa agreements or moved ahead in the index. India's overall passport strength has in fact improved over the years, as the country ranked 85th in October 2025 with access to 57 destinations, meaning the current ranking still represents stronger global mobility compared to previous years.
- **Visa-Free Access for Indian Passport Holders:** Indian passport holders currently enjoy easier access to 56 destinations through three different entry options. Around 30 countries allow Indians to enter without any visa at all, including Bhutan, Nepal, Fiji, Barbados, Mauritius and Thailand. Twenty-three destinations such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Jordan issue visas on arrival. Three countries, namely Kenya, Seychelles and Saint Kitts and Nevis, require an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) before departure.
- **India's Passport Performance Over the Years:** Historical data from 2006 to 2026 shows that India's best passport ranking was 71st in 2006, while its lowest was 90th in 2021 during the period affected by global pandemic-related travel restrictions. Despite periodic fluctuations, the broader trend remains positive, with India's passport becoming stronger over time and offering broader travel opportunities than it did just a few years ago.
- **World's Most Powerful Passports in May 2026:** Singapore continues to hold the world's strongest passport, offering visa-free access to 192 destinations. Japan, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) share the second position with access to 187 destinations. Sweden ranks next with 186 destinations, followed by several European nations including France, Germany and Spain with access to 185 destinations.

India Assumes Chairmanship of the Common Criteria Development Board

In the News: India has been nominated as the Chair of the Common Criteria Development Board (CCDB) for a two-year term from April 2026 to April 2028, marking a significant milestone in the country's growing leadership in international IT security standards development. The appointment was confirmed during the 1st Quarter Meeting of the Common Criteria Recognition Arrangement (CCRA), held from 14th to 16th April 2026 in Tokyo, Japan.

Key Points:

- **Common Criteria Recognition Arrangement (CCRA):** The CCRA is a foundational international treaty that enables the mutual recognition of IT security certificates across borders, facilitating seamless international trade in secure IT products without the need for re-certification. The arrangement currently comprises 20 certificate-authorizing nations and 18 certificate-consuming nations. These countries collectively maintain the Common Criteria Portal, which serves as the authoritative global repository and "single source of truth" for certified secure IT products worldwide.

- **Role of the CCDB:** The Common Criteria Development Board (CCDB) serves as the technical core of the CCRA, managing the international work program for the Common Criteria (CC) and the Common Methodology for Information Technology Security Evaluation (CEM). While other CCRA groups handle policy matters, the CCDB focuses specifically on technical standards and evaluation criteria that underpin the security of global IT products. India's chairmanship positions it at the forefront of defining international security evaluation methodologies.
- **India's Role in the CCRA:** India has been an active member of the CCRA since September 16, 2013, as a Certificate Authorizing Nation. The country participates through the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Standardisation Testing and Quality Certification (STQC) Directorate, which acts as the official Certification Body for IT security evaluations in India. The chairmanship reflects increasing global confidence in India's technical expertise and institutional capabilities in cybersecurity standards.
- **Broader Implications for Global Cybersecurity Cooperation:** India's assumption of the CCDB Chair is likely to deepen cooperation with global partners on cyber resilience, secure digital products and trusted cross-border technology ecosystems. The leadership role reinforces India's position as an emerging global hub for digital innovation, cybersecurity governance and standards development. It also strengthens India's capacity to contribute to global discussions on information security evaluation and certification processes through its national agencies and technical institutions.

PM Modi's UAE Visit: India and UAE Sign 7 Major Strategic Outcomes

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the United Arab Emirates and held discussions with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi. The visit, which was the first leg of PM Modi's five-nation tour, resulted in the signing of seven major strategic agreements spanning energy security, defence cooperation, maritime infrastructure, artificial intelligence, supercomputing, investment and skill development. The UAE also pledged investments worth 5 billion US dollars in India, further reinforcing the bilateral strategic partnership.

Key Points:

- **Energy Security and Strategic Petroleum Reserves:** India and the UAE signed a strategic collaboration agreement between Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL) and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) to strengthen India's energy security framework. Under this agreement, the UAE's participation in India's strategic petroleum reserves will be enhanced to 30 million barrels, and strategic gas reserves will be set up in India for the first time. A separate pact was signed between Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) and ADNOC to ensure long-term and reliable supply of LPG, the cooking fuel widely used across Indian households.
- **Defence and Strategic Partnership:** India and the UAE signed a Framework for Strategic Defence Partnership focusing on defence industrial collaboration, co-development, technology sharing, innovation and regional security cooperation. Under this framework, the two countries will explore joint development of military hardware and boost cooperation in advanced defence manufacturing and capabilities. Defence cooperation between the two nations is steered through a Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) at the Ministry level, established through an MoU on Defence Cooperation signed in June 2003.
- **Maritime Infrastructure and Skill Development:** Two agreements were signed involving Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) and Drydocks World (DDW) of the UAE, including an MoU for setting up a Ship Repair Cluster at Vadinar in Gujarat to strengthen India's position as a growing maritime and logistics hub. The second MoU, signed among CSL, DDW and the Centre of Excellence in Maritime and Shipbuilding (CEMS), focuses on skill development in ship repair, including specialised training and technical upskilling. These initiatives align with the Make in India and Skill India Mission and aim to support India's emergence as a global hub for skilled maritime professionals.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Supercomputing:** India and the UAE signed a Term Sheet for setting up an 8 Exaflop Supercomputing Cluster in partnership between the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) of India and G42 of the UAE. This partnership will accelerate India's sovereign AI and high-performance computing capabilities and boost the IndiaAI Mission. Additionally, the UAE pledged investments worth 5 billion US dollars in India's infrastructure and banking sectors, further enhancing long-term capital flows and investor confidence between the two economies.

- **India-UAE Bilateral Relations - Background:** India and the UAE established formal diplomatic relations in 1972, and the bilateral relationship has transformed from traditional trade linkages into a wide-ranging strategic partnership in recent years. PM Modi has visited the UAE seven times since 2014, and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan has visited India five times. Bilateral merchandise trade between the two countries crossed 100 billion US dollars for the first time, reaching 101.25 billion US dollars in the financial year 2025-26, and both sides have committed to doubling bilateral trade to 200 billion US dollars by 2032.

BRICS Reaffirms Two-State Solution in Israel-Palestine Conflict

In the News: BRICS foreign ministers met in New Delhi, India, and reaffirmed their support for a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the two-state solution. The Chair's Statement called for the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine within the internationally recognized pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The ministers also demanded an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Key Points:

- **Two-State Solution and Palestinian Statehood:** The BRICS foreign ministers reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to the two-state solution in accordance with international law, relevant United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and the Arab Peace Initiative. They called for the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine within the internationally recognized 1967 borders, which include the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital, envisioning two states living side by side in peace and security. The ministers also supported full membership for the State of Palestine in the United Nations and called for adequate representation of Palestine in all relevant international organizations, including multilateral financial institutions.
- **Ceasefire and Humanitarian Access in Gaza:** The ministers expressed grave concern over the resumption of continuous Israeli attacks against Gaza and the obstruction of humanitarian aid into the territory. They called on all parties to engage in good faith negotiations to achieve an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire, the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and all other parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the release of all hostages and detainees held in violation of international law, and sustained and unhindered access and delivery of humanitarian assistance. They also condemned the use of starvation as a method of warfare and reaffirmed their steadfast support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and its mandate for the provision of basic services to Palestine refugees.
- **Legal and Institutional Framework:** The BRICS statement recalled the Gaza Strip as an inseparable part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and underlined the importance of unifying the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the Palestinian Authority. The ministers noted the provisional measures of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the legal proceedings instituted by South Africa against Israel, which reaffirmed Israel's legal obligation to ensure the provision of humanitarian aid in Gaza. They also took note of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803 and called for the implementation of all relevant UNGA and UNSC resolutions on the matter.

Ali Falih Kadhim al-Zaidi on assuming office as the Prime Minister of Iraq

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Ali Falih Kadhim al-Zaidi on assuming office as the Prime Minister of Iraq. PM Modi stated that India highly values its longstanding and friendly ties with Iraq and remains firmly committed to further strengthening bilateral ties in all areas. He expressed his best wishes and looked forward to working together for the shared progress and prosperity of both nations.

Key Points:

- **Appointment and Parliamentary Approval:** Ali Falih Kadhim al-Zaidi was nominated as the Prime Minister-designate of Iraq by the Iraqi President following an extensive selection process. Iraq's Parliament, on May 14, 2026, voted to approve the government programme and a part of the Cabinet lineup of al-Zaidi, formally paving the way for him to assume charge as the new Prime Minister of Iraq.
- **Background and Selection Process:** Al-Zaidi, a businessman by profession, emerged as a consensus candidate for the position of Prime Minister after weeks of internal deliberations among the Coordination Framework's member



parties. The discussions were aimed at identifying a compromise candidate who could lead the next government in Iraq and command broad political support across the coalition.

- **India-Iraq Bilateral Relations:** Prime Minister Modi, in his congratulatory message posted on the social media platform X, emphasized that India highly values its longstanding and friendly ties with Iraq. He reaffirmed India's firm commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations in all areas, signalling continued diplomatic engagement and cooperation between New Delhi and Baghdad under the new Iraqi leadership.
- **Strategic Significance of India-Iraq Ties:** India and Iraq share deep historical and cultural connections, with bilateral relations spanning trade, energy, and people-to-people exchanges. Iraq is one of India's major crude oil suppliers, making the relationship vital for India's energy security. The transition of leadership in Iraq holds significance for the continuity of economic and strategic cooperation between the two nations.

SCIENCE AND TECH

India test nuclear capable Agni missile with MIRV system

In the News: India successfully flight-tested an advanced variant of the nuclear-capable Agni-5 ballistic missile equipped with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology off the coast of Odisha. This was the second known test of the Agni-5 Mk-2, also referred to as 'Divyastra', following its maiden flight test under Mission Divyastra in March 2024. The missile, with an officially declared strike range of over 5,000 km, can target deep into the Eurasian landmass, including northern China, and represents a significant step in India's strategic deterrence capability.

Key Points:

- **Successful Flight Test:** India successfully flight-tested an advanced variant of the Agni-5 ballistic missile equipped with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology on May 8, 2026, off the coast of Odisha but DRDO confirmed it on May 9, 2026.
- **Mission Name and Variant:** The missile, known as Agni-5 Mark-2 (Mk-2) or 'Divyastra', is an advanced MIRV-capable iteration of the original Agni-5, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- **Second Known Test:** This marked the second known test of the Agni-5 Mk-2, with the maiden flight test conducted under Mission Divyastra in March 2024 from Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha.
- **MIRV Technology:** Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology allows a single ballistic missile to carry multiple nuclear warheads, each capable of striking a different target independently.
- **Elite Group of Nations:** Only a handful of countries possess operational MIRV capability, including the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, placing India in a select club of nations with this strategic technology.
- **About Agni Series:** The Agni series of missiles is a family of medium-to-intercontinental range ballistic missiles indigenously developed by the DRDO, forming the backbone of India's land-based nuclear deterrent.

Indias first Orbital Data Center Satellite

In the News: Bengaluru-based imaging satellite company Pixxel announced a strategic partnership with Indian artificial intelligence (AI) firm Sarvam to develop and launch India's first orbital data centre satellite, named Pathfinder. The 200 kg-class satellite, scheduled to reach orbit by the fourth quarter of 2026, will carry datacentre-class Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) alongside Pixxel's flagship hyperspectral imaging camera, enabling real-time artificial intelligence (AI) inference and data processing directly in orbit.

Key Points:

- **Strategic Partnership:** Pixxel, a planetary intelligence company that builds and operates advanced imaging satellites, has partnered with Sarvam, an Indian AI firm, to develop and launch India's first orbital data centre satellite named Pathfinder.
- **Role Division:** Pixxel will design, build, launch, and operate the Pathfinder satellite, while Sarvam will provide the AI backbone — handling both training and inference directly in orbit through full-stack language models running on board the satellite.

- **Satellite Specifications:** The Pathfinder is a 200 kg-class satellite scheduled to reach orbit as early as the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2026, marking a significant step in India's space and AI ecosystem.
- **What is an Orbital Data Centre:** An orbital data centre is a constellation of satellites carrying GPUs found in terrestrial data centres, capable of training and running AI models directly in orbit rather than only relaying data to ground stations for processing.
- **Global Players:** Major global firms have entered the space, including SpaceX (Starlink V3 satellites with high-speed laser links), Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin, Microsoft's Azure Space, and Lonestar Data Holdings, though none has yet produced a commercial-scale orbital data centre.
- **Production at Gigapixel:** The satellite will be developed at Gigapixel, Pixxel's upcoming facility designed to scale satellite production to up to 100 units, strengthening India's capability to build and deploy next-generation space infrastructure.

DRDO successfully conducts long-duration scramjet combustor test in Hyderabad

In the News: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully conducted a long-duration test of its Actively Cooled Full-Scale Scramjet Combustor at the Scramjet Connect Pipe Test (SCPT) facility in Hyderabad. The test achieved a run-time of over 1,200 seconds, surpassing the earlier 700-second test conducted in January 2026, marking a major breakthrough in India's hypersonic cruise missile development programme.

Key Points:

- **About the Test:** DRDO conducted an extensive long-duration ground test of the Actively Cooled Full-Scale Scramjet Combustor, achieving a run-time of over 1,200 seconds. The test built upon the earlier 700-plus second test carried out in January 2026, demonstrating significant progress in sustained scramjet operation.
- **Test Facility:** The test was conducted at the Scramjet Connect Pipe Test (SCPT) facility at the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad, which is the premier DRDO facility responsible for the design and development of state-of-the-art missile systems and technologies. The success also validated the capabilities of this state-of-the-art test facility.
- **Hypersonic Cruise Missile Capability:** The scramjet combustor is central to India's Hypersonic Cruise Missile Development Programme. Hypersonic cruise missiles are capable of exceeding five times the speed of sound, or over 6,100 km per hour, for extended periods, and have the potential to defeat air defence systems available with major military powers.
- **Air-Breathing Engine:** The high speed is achieved through a cutting-edge supersonic air-breathing engine, which utilises supersonic combustion to sustain long-duration flight. The scramjet combustor incorporates an innovative flame stabilisation technique that holds a continuous flame inside the combustor with an air speed of more than 1.5 km per second.
- **Indigenous Endothermic Fuel:** An indigenously developed liquid hydrocarbon endothermic scramjet fuel, jointly developed for the first time by DRDL and industry partners, is central to the breakthrough. The fuel offers dual benefits of significant cooling improvement and ease of ignition.
- **Thermal Barrier Coating (TBC):** A new advanced ceramic Thermal Barrier Coating with high thermal resistance, capable of operating beyond the melting point of steel, has been jointly developed by DRDL and Department of Science and Technology (DST) facilities. The TBC is designed to withstand extreme temperatures encountered during hypersonic flight.

AERB Clears Restart of Tarapur Unit-2

In the News: The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) approved the restart and continued operation of Unit 2 of Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS) following the successful completion of major refurbishment work undertaken by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL). The permission allows the unit to operate for a further period of 10 years and marks a significant milestone in the safe life-extension of one of Asia's oldest commercial nuclear power plants.

Key Points:

- **AERB Approval:** The Board of AERB, on May 6, 2026, after reviewing the refurbishment, safety upgrades, inspections, and assessments through its multi-tiered safety review process, agreed to permit the restart of TAPS Unit-2 and its operation for a further period of 10 years. The formal permission was issued on May 7, 2026.
- **About TAPS Units 1 & 2:** Tarapur Atomic Power Station Units 1 and 2 are India's first nuclear power reactors and Asia's first commercial nuclear power plant units, based on the Boiling Water Reactor (BWR) design. They were commissioned and commenced commercial operation in 1969. The plant is located at Tarapur, near Boisar in Palghar District of Maharashtra.
- **Major Refurbishment Work:** The refurbishment of Unit-2 included complete replacement of the reactor coolant recirculation piping with forged piping and fittings made of advanced corrosion-resistant Stainless Steel, enhancing the safety and reliability of the reactor.
- **Ageing and Residual Life Assessment:** During the ongoing outage, critical reactor components such as the reactor pressure vessel welds were inspected to assess ageing status and residual life. The evaluations confirmed that the reactor can continue safe operation with the normal maintenance and surveillance programme.
- **TAPS Unit-1 Status:** Earlier, TAPS Unit-1 underwent a similar refurbishment and review process, after which the AERB permitted its restart at the end of December 2025. The unit is currently operational at its rated power of 160 MWe.
- **Regulatory Oversight:** The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) will continue to maintain regulatory oversight and monitor the safety performance of TAPS Units 1 and 2 to ensure safe operation throughout the extended operating period.

India's 1st Indigenous Glide Weapon TARA

In the News: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) successfully conducted the maiden flight-trial of the Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) weapon system off the coast of Odisha. TARA is India's first indigenous glide weapon system, designed to convert conventional unguided warheads into precision-guided weapons for accurately engaging ground-based targets.

Key Points:

- **About TARA:** Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) is a modular range extension kit and India's first indigenous glide weapon system. It is designed to convert unguided warheads (gravity bombs) into precision-guided weapons, significantly enhancing the strike capabilities of the armed forces.
- **Maiden Flight Trial:** DRDO and the IAF jointly conducted the successful maiden flight-trial of the TARA weapon system off the coast of Odisha on May 7, 2026, marking a major milestone in indigenous defence technology.
- **Strategic Objective:** The system is aimed at improving the range, lethality, and strike accuracy of low-cost conventional aerial weapons, enabling them to engage targets over long distances with greater precision. TARA can be launched from multiple fighter aircraft in the IAF's inventory, which increases operational flexibility.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** TARA is the first glide weapon to utilise state-of-the-art low-cost systems, making high-precision strikes more economically sustainable for the armed forces.
- **Developmental Agency:** The system has been designed and developed by the Research Centre Imarat (RCI), Hyderabad, along with other DRDO laboratories.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat Push:** The project has been undertaken in collaboration with Development-cum-Production Partners (DcPP) and Indian private industries, which have already commenced production activity, thereby strengthening the domestic defence manufacturing ecosystem.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

India Celebrates Healthcare Heroes with Florence Nightingale Awards 2026

In the News: President Droupadi Murmu conferred the National Florence Nightingale Awards 2026 on fifteen nursing professionals at a ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan on the occasion of International Nurses Day. The awards recognized outstanding contributions in the field of nursing and healthcare services across the country.

Key Points:

- **Award Ceremony:** President Droupadi Murmu presented the National Florence Nightingale Awards 2026 at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi. The ceremony was attended by Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda and Ministers of State for Health Prataprao Jadhav along with other senior officials.
- **About the Award:** The National Florence Nightingale Award was instituted in 1973 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) as a mark of recognition for meritorious services rendered by nursing personnel to society. Each award includes a Certificate of Merit, a cash prize of one lakh rupees and a medal.
- **Eligibility:** The awards are presented to Registered Nurses, Midwives, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and Lady Health Visitors (LHVs) serving across Central and State Governments, Union Territories and voluntary organisations.
- **Notable Awardees:** Among the fifteen recipients were Kulwinder Parhi (Leh), Ujwala Mahadev Soyam (Maharashtra), Lalenthangi Hnamte (Mizoram), Madhu Mala Gurung (Sikkim), Gita Karmakar (West Bengal), Poonam Verma (Chandigarh), Kabitha Jagannath (Karnataka), Aysha Beebu K. (Lakshadweep), Dr. R Shankar Shanumugam (Tamil Nadu) and Maj Gen Lissamma PV (Indian Army).
- **International Nurses Day 2026:** The ceremony coincided with International Nurses Day, celebrated every year on May 12 to mark the birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale. The theme for 2026 is "Our Nurses. Our Future. Empowered Nurses Save Lives," emphasizing better working conditions, fair salaries, leadership opportunities and access to quality education and training for nurses.

ECONOMY

India Raises Import Duty on Gold and Silver to 15%

In the News: The Indian government hiked the customs duty on gold and silver imports from 6% to 15% to curb non-essential precious metal imports and conserve foreign exchange reserves amid the ongoing West Asia crisis. The move comes after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to citizens to avoid purchasing gold for one year. The total effective import duty of 15% includes a 10% basic customs duty and a 5% Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC).

Key Points:

- **Duty Structure and Coverage:** The government increased the basic customs duty on gold and silver imports from 5% to 10% and the Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC) from 1% to 5%, taking the total effective import duty to 15%. Import duty on gold and silver findings, which are small components such as hooks, clasps, clamps, pins and screws used in jewellery, has been raised to 5%. The effective import duty on platinum has also been increased to 15.4% from 6.4%, with platinum findings attracting a 5.4% duty. Additionally, a 3% Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) will be payable on all imports of precious metals over and above the basic customs duty and AIDC.
- **Forex Reserves and Rupee Depreciation:** India's foreign exchange reserves have depleted by nearly 38 billion US dollars in just two months since the start of the West Asia conflict, falling to 691 billion US dollars. The Indian rupee hit an all-time low of 95.75 per US dollar on May 13, 2026, and has been Asia's worst-performing currency in 2026, losing almost 5% against the US dollar since the conflict began and 6% overall during the year. Foreign Institutional Investor (FII) outflows in the January to May 2026 period stood at Rs 1.97 lakh crore, adding further pressure on the external sector. Officials described the duty hike as a carefully calibrated and proportionate intervention to address external vulnerabilities.
- **Gold Import Trends and Current Account Deficit (CAD):** Gold constitutes the second-largest item in India's import bill after crude oil, with gold imports rising by 24.1% to 71.97 billion US dollars in Financial Year 2025-26 compared to 58 billion US dollars in the previous financial year. Gold prices have surged over 40% in the past year, inflating the import bill even as physical gold imports declined from 757.09 tonnes to 721.04 tonnes in the same period. Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran stated that managing the current account credibly, financing it, and preventing further currency depreciation are the central macroeconomic imperatives of Financial Year 2026-27. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has also called for a review of tariff concessions on precious metals under the India-United Arab Emirates (UAE) free trade agreement, which it says has fuelled import growth.

SPORTS

Rahul Dravid Becomes Owner of Dublin Franchise in ETPL

In the News: Former India captain and coach Rahul Dravid has been announced as the co-owner of the Dublin franchise in the European T20 Premier League (ETPL), completing the six-team structure of the league ahead of its planned 2026 debut. The Dublin team, named Dublin Guardians, will be captained by former India spin-bowling all-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin. The announcement was made at a launch event in Dublin on May 11, 2026, attended by ETPL co-founders including Bollywood actor Abhishek Bachchan, along with franchise stakeholders and senior officials from European cricket bodies.

Key Points:

- **About the European T20 Premier League (ETPL):** The ETPL is Europe's first International Cricket Council (ICC)-sanctioned multi-country franchise Twenty20 (T20) competition. The league is being run in collaboration with Cricket Ireland, Cricket Scotland and the Royal Dutch Cricket Association. Six franchises are based out of Dublin, Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, with franchises sold for approximately 11.1 million pounds (15 million US dollars) over a ten-year period. The inaugural tournament is scheduled to be played from August 26 to September 20, 2026, with matches staged in The Hague and Dublin.
- **Dravid's Role and Vision:** Rahul Dravid, aged 53, who played 164 Tests and 344 One Day Internationals (ODIs) for India and coached the national team from 2021 to 2024, is part of an Indian consortium that has acquired the Dublin Guardians franchise. Dravid stated that the league's focus on strengthening grassroots development and creating pathways for emerging talent across Ireland and Europe attracted him to the project. He highlighted Dublin's passionate cricketing community and the enormous potential for growth of the sport in the region.
- **Franchise Ownership Structure:** The six ETPL franchise teams have been acquired by prominent figures from the cricketing world. The Dublin franchise is owned by Rahul Dravid, Belfast by Glenn Maxwell and Rohan Lund, Edinburgh by Kyle Mills, Nathan McCullum and Rachel Wiseman, Glasgow by Vipul Aggarwal and Chris Gayle, Amsterdam by Steve Waugh, Jamie Dwyer and Tim Thomas, and Rotterdam by Jonty Rhodes, Faf du Plessis and Samir Shah with Madhukar Shree as managing partner.
- **Player Involvement and Talent Development:** The league is expected to feature international cricketers including Mitchell Marsh, Tim David, Mitchell Santner, Liam Livingstone, Glenn Maxwell, Faf du Plessis and Heinrich Klaasen, among others. The ETPL aims to create opportunities for emerging players from Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands and other Associate nations to compete alongside established international stars. Ravichandran Ashwin, who retired from Test cricket in December 2024 and stepped away from the Indian Premier League (IPL), will captain the Dublin Guardians.

ENVIRONMENT

The 1877 Climate Disaster Connection: Why Scientists Fear a Historic Super El Niño

In the News: Scientists have warned that a super El Niño is slowly building in the Pacific Ocean, with some researchers comparing it to the devastating 1877-78 climate event that killed tens of millions worldwide. According to the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), water temperatures in the central equatorial Pacific could potentially exceed 3 degrees Celsius above average late in 2026, making it potentially the strongest such event since the 1870s.

Key Points:

- **Understanding El Niño and Super El Niño:** El Niño is a natural climate pattern involving the warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean, part of the larger El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) system. It occurs on average every two years and affects ocean currents, coastal fisheries, and weather patterns from Australia to South America and Asia. A "super" El Niño is classified when sea surface temperatures rise at least 2 degrees Celsius above normal, and such events are rare but capable of disrupting global weather systems on a massive scale.

- **The 1877-78 Disaster and Its Legacy:** The 1877-78 super El Niño is described by climate researchers as arguably the worst environmental disaster to ever befall humanity. It triggered severe droughts, crop failures, and mass famines across multiple continents, killing an estimated 50 million people, roughly three to four per cent of the world's population at the time. Research published in the American Meteorological Society estimated deaths of 12.2 to 29.3 million in India, 19.5 to 30 million in China, and around 2 million in Brazil, with outbreaks of malaria, plague, dysentery, smallpox, and cholera ravaging famine-weakened populations.
- **2026 Forecast and Global Concerns:** Paul Roundy of the State University of New York at Albany has noted that confidence is shifting higher on this potentially being the biggest El Niño event since the 1870s. Climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe has warned it could have a profound impact on human society and well-being, while experts caution it could permanently push the planet past the 1.5 degrees Celsius warming threshold, risking potentially irreversible climate impacts. David Wallace-Wells has suggested that 2027 could become the hottest year on record by some margin as a result.
- **Impact on India's Monsoon and Economy:** India's weather office has forecast a below-average monsoon in 2026, with the El Niño expected to weigh on rainfall in the latter half of the June to September season. The monsoon delivers nearly 70 per cent of India's rainfall and is vital for the agricultural sector, which accounts for about 18 per cent of the nearly \$4 trillion economy and employs nearly half of the 1.5 billion population

Bhupender Yadav Launches 'Lion' Species Spotlight Programme at Sasan Gir

In the News: Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav inaugurated the 'Lion' Species Spotlight Programme at Sasan Gir, Gujarat, as a pre-summit event under the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) Summit 2026. The event showcased India's successful Asiatic Lion conservation model and aimed to promote international cooperation among lion range countries ahead of the first-ever IBCA Summit scheduled for June 1-2, 2026, in New Delhi.

Key Points:

- **IBCA Summit 2026 and Species Spotlight Event:** The 'Lion' Species Spotlight Programme was organised as part of a series of pre-summit species events under the IBCA Summit 2026, which will be held in New Delhi on June 1-2 under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Carrying the tagline "Save Big Cats, Save Humanity, Save Ecosystem," the summit will bring together 400 representatives from 95 range countries across Asia, Africa and the Americas. The IBCA is a global coalition dedicated to the conservation of seven iconic big cat species: Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar and Puma.
- **Asiatic Lion Conservation Success:** The lion population in the Greater Gir Landscape has risen to an estimated 891 individuals in 2025, marking a 32% increase compared to 2020. Minister Yadav highlighted that effective conservation and management efforts have helped stabilise and expand lion sub-populations across several regions of the Gir landscape. The Asiatic lion receives the highest level of legal protection under Appendix-I of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- **Project Lion and Conservation Initiatives:** 'Project Lion', launched by the Government of India in 2020, adopts a comprehensive landscape-based approach for the long-term conservation of Asiatic lions through habitat restoration, population management and ecological resilience. Key steps being taken in mission mode include the Asiatic Lion Population Estimation initiative, the establishment of a National Wildlife Referral Centre in Junagadh and the development of Barda Wildlife Sanctuary as a new site for the natural dispersal of Asiatic lions.
- **Community Participation and Ecological Approach:** Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, who joined the event virtually, highlighted the crucial role of community participation in lion conservation, noting that the lion is deeply embedded in the region's popular culture, which has contributed to the flourishing population. He described Gir as a living example of how economic progress can go hand in hand with wildlife conservation through an ecological approach. He credited PM Modi's vision of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' for the establishment of the IBCA and the growing global consciousness towards big cat conservation.