CONTENTS

IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Justice Revati Mohite Dere Becomes Meghalaya's First Woman Chief Justice

In the News: Justice Revati Mohite Dere was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the High Court of Meghalaya, becoming the second woman to head the court since its formation in 2013. Meghalaya Governor C.H. Vijayashankar administered the oath of office at a ceremony held at the Durbar Hall of Lok Bhavan, Shillong.

Key Points:

- **Supreme Court Collegium Recommendation:** The Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice Suren Kant, recommended the appointment of Justice Revati P. Mohite Dere as Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court on December 18, 2025. She formally took oath on January 10, 2026, assuming charge of the court which has a sanctioned strength of just four judges, making it one of India's smaller High Courts compared to the Bombay High Court where she previously served.
- **Historic Appointment - Second Woman Chief Justice:** Justice Dere becomes the second woman Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court since its formation in 2013. The first woman Chief Justice was Justice T. Meena Kumari.
- **Judicial Career at Bombay High Court:** Justice Dere was appointed as an Additional Judge of the Bombay High Court on June 21, 2013, and was elevated as a permanent Judge on March 2, 2016. During her over 12 years of service at the Bombay High Court, she became the second senior-most judge and was part of several important benches.
- **Notable Judgments and Judicial Philosophy:** She is known for her work on cases ranging from Haji Ali and Shakti Mills to queer rights and police accountability.

Rajnath Singh to commission new coast guard ship

In the News: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned the Indian Coast Guard Ship (ICGS) Samudra Pratap, India's first indigenously designed and built Pollution Control Vessel, at Goa Shipyard Limited in Goa.

Key Points:

- **Indigenous Design and Construction:** ICGS Samudra Pratap is India's first indigenously designed and built hybrid, sea-going pollution control vessel, marking the first time pollution-control ships of this class have been designed and constructed entirely in India. Built by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL), a premier defence public sector undertaking, the vessel incorporates over 60% indigenous content.
- **Technical Specifications:** Named "Majesty of the Seas," Samudra Pratap displaces 4,170 tonnes (reported as 4,200 tons in some sources), measures 114.5 metres in length with a beam of 16.5 metres, and can achieve speeds exceeding 22 knots.
- **Advanced Systems and Capabilities:** The vessel is equipped with advanced pollution detection systems, dedicated pollution response boats with oil spill recovery capabilities, and modern firefighting equipment. The ship also features a helicopter hangar and aviation support facilities, significantly increasing its operational reach and effectiveness.
- **Armament and Security Features:** ICGS Samudra Pratap is armed with a 30 mm CRN-91 gun and two 12.7 mm stabilised remote-controlled guns, enabling it to perform maritime security and law enforcement operations alongside its primary pollution control mission.
- **Project Background and Contract:** Goa Shipyard Limited was constructing two pollution control vessels for the Indian Coast Guard under a Rs 583 crore contract signed on June 22, 2021. ICGS Samudra Pratap is the first of these two vessels, with the second ship currently under construction.
- **Operational Base and Deployment:** The ship will be based at Kochi under the operational control of the Coast Guard Region (West). Its extended endurance and advanced capabilities make it ideal for long-duration missions in both territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

India and Germany Various Pacts On German Chancellor Visit To India

In the News: German Chancellor Friedrich Merz visited India for high-level bilateral talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. The visit, which marked Merz's first trip to an Asian country since assuming office, resulted in the signing of multiple agreements and declarations across migration, security, clean energy, and cultural cooperation.

Key Points:

- **Migration and Skills Partnership:** India and Germany issued a Joint Declaration of Intent on the Global Skills Partnership, aimed at facilitating structured mobility of skilled workers with special focus on healthcare professionals.
- **Visa-Free Transit Facility:** A major facilitation measure was announced providing visa-free transit for Indian citizens traveling through Germany.
- **Security Cooperation Agreements:** India and Germany signed agreements to strengthen security cooperation, reflecting shared concerns over global and regional stability.
- **India-Germany Centre of Excellence:** Both leaders announced the establishment of an India-Germany Centre of Excellence focused on advancing green technologies, innovation, and climate solutions. This initiative institutionalizes collaboration in clean and sustainable energy, aligning with India's energy transition goals and Germany's global leadership in clean technology.
- **Bilateral Trade Milestone:** India-Germany bilateral trade reached specifically USD 51.23 billion, reflecting the growing economic partnership between the two nations. Both countries are also working to finalize a long-pending Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that could further expand trade, investment, and supply chain integration.
- **Maritime Heritage Cooperation:** A partnership was announced between the German Maritime Museum and India's National Maritime Heritage Complex being developed at Lothal in Gujarat. Prime Minister Modi described this collaboration as a historic step connecting the maritime histories of both nations through cultural diplomacy.

Census 2027
In the News: The Government of India has announced plans to conduct the Census 2027, marking the country's first digital census. This will be India's 16th national census since independence and the first to be conducted entirely through digital means, representing a significant modernization of the census process that was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Key Points:
- **Digital Census Initiative:** Census 2027 will be India's first completely digital census, with data collection conducted using mobile applications and tablets. This marks a departure from the traditional paper-based method used in all previous censuses.
- **Timeline and Phases:** The census exercise is expected to commence in 2027, with the reference date likely to be set for early 2027. The process will be conducted in two phases: house listing and housing census, followed by the population enumeration phase.
- **Delayed Exercise:** The census was originally due in 2021 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent logistical challenges. The last census was conducted in 2011, making this the longest gap between two censuses in independent India's history.
- **NPR Integration:** The National Population Register (NPR) exercise may be conducted alongside the census. The NPR is a comprehensive database of usual residents of the country and contains demographic and biometric information.
- **Caste Census Debate:** There has been significant political discourse regarding the inclusion of caste-based enumeration beyond Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Various state governments and political parties have demanded a comprehensive caste census to inform policy decisions.

India Unveils Logo and Website for BRICS Presidency 2026
In the News: India has officially unveiled the logo and dedicated website for its BRICS Presidency in 2026. As the rotating chair of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), India will lead the grouping's activities and host the annual summit, showcasing its diplomatic priorities and vision for multilateral cooperation among emerging economies.
Key Points:
- **BRICS Presidency 2026:** India assumes the rotating presidency of BRICS for 2026, following the established sequence among member nations. The presidency provides India with a platform to shape the bloc's agenda and strengthen cooperation on economic, political, and cultural fronts.
- **Official Logo Launch:** India unveiled the official logo for its BRICS Presidency 2026, representing the nation's cultural heritage and vision for collective growth. The logo design typically incorporates elements symbolizing unity, diversity, and partnership among BRICS nations.
- **BRICS Expansion Context:** India's presidency follows the bloc's historic expansion in 2024, when new members including Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and UAE were invited to join, transforming BRICS into a larger geopolitical entity representing a significant portion of global GDP and population.

- **Annual Summit Planning:** As the host nation, India will organize the BRICS Summit 2026, bringing together heads of state and government from member countries to discuss global challenges and opportunities for mutual benefit.

Jio to Launch People-First AI Platform for India and the World

In the News: Reliance Jio has announced plans to launch a "people-first" artificial intelligence platform designed to serve India and global markets. This initiative represents Jio's strategic entry into the AI ecosystem, aiming to democratize AI technology and make it accessible to millions of users across diverse sectors and demographics.

Key Points:

- **People-First AI Approach:** Jio's AI platform is being developed with a focus on inclusivity, accessibility, and user-centricity. The "people-first" philosophy emphasizes creating AI solutions that address real-world challenges faced by ordinary citizens, businesses, and communities.
- **India-Centric Development:** The platform is being designed with India's unique linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity in mind. It aims to support multiple Indian languages and cater to the specific needs of India's digital population while maintaining global scalability.
- **Democratization of AI:** Jio intends to make advanced AI capabilities accessible to the masses, following its successful model of democratizing telecom and digital services in India. The platform will likely offer AI tools and services at affordable price points to maximize adoption.
- **Integration with Jio Ecosystem:** The AI platform is expected to integrate seamlessly with Jio's existing suite of services, including telecommunications, JioMart, JioFinance, and other digital offerings, creating a comprehensive AI-powered ecosystem.

Union Budget of India 2026–27: Date, Time, Constitutional Basis and Key Details

In the News: The Union Budget of India for the fiscal year 2026–27 is scheduled to be presented in Parliament, outlining the government's fiscal policy, revenue and expenditure estimates, and economic priorities for the upcoming year.

Key Points:

- **Budget Presentation Date and Time:** The Union Budget 2026–27 is expected to be presented on February 1, 2026, following the tradition established in recent years of presenting the Budget on the first day of February. The Finance Minister will present the Budget speech in the Lok Sabha at 11:00 AM, detailing the government's fiscal proposals and policy initiatives.
- **Constitutional Basis:** The Union Budget derives its authority from Article 112 of the Indian Constitution, which mandates the presentation of an "Annual Financial Statement" before Parliament.
- **Parliamentary Approval Process:** Following presentation, the Budget undergoes detailed scrutiny through various stages including general discussion in both Houses of Parliament, examination by Parliamentary Standing Committees, discussion and voting on Demand for Grants, passage of the Appropriation Bill (authorizing expenditure), and passage of the Finance Bill (implementing tax and revenue measures).
- **Digital Budget Presentation:** In keeping with modern practices, the Budget is presented digitally through a tablet device, eliminating the traditional "briefcase" ceremony. The complete Budget documents are made available on the Union Budget portal immediately after the Finance Minister's speech, ensuring transparency and public access.

India-Germany Sign 19 Strategic Deals to Boost Defence, Tech and Minerals Cooperation

In the News: India and Germany have signed 19 strategic agreements aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation across defence, technology, and critical minerals sectors. These comprehensive deals mark a significant deepening of the India-Germany strategic partnership, reflecting shared interests in economic development and strategic autonomy in an increasingly multipolar world.

Key Points:

- **Comprehensive Agreement Package:** The two nations signed 19 bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) covering diverse sectors including defence manufacturing and technology transfer, advanced technology collaboration, critical minerals sourcing and processing, renewable energy and green hydrogen, digital infrastructure and artificial intelligence, and trade and investment facilitation.

- **Defence Cooperation Enhancement:** The defence agreements focus on co-production and co-development of military equipment, technology sharing in areas such as submarine technology and aerospace systems, joint research and development initiatives, defence industrial collaboration under India's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.
- **Critical Minerals Cooperation:** Recognizing the strategic importance of critical minerals for energy transition and high-tech manufacturing, the agreements include partnerships for exploration and mining of lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements, other critical minerals and technology transfer for sustainable extraction methods.
- **Renewable Energy and Climate Action:** The deals encompass cooperation on green hydrogen production and technology, offshore wind energy development, energy storage solutions and battery technologies, carbon capture and storage initiatives, and collaborative research on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.
- **Economic and Trade Dimensions:** The agreements aim to boost bilateral trade and investment, facilitate German investments in Indian manufacturing sectors, promote Indian startups' access to German markets and technology, enhance skill development and vocational training partnerships, and strengthen supply chain integration between both economies.

In SC's split verdict on corruption law, what judges disagreed on

In the News: The Supreme Court of India delivered a split verdict on a crucial corruption law case, with judges expressing divergent views on the interpretation and application of anti-corruption provisions.

Key Points:

- **Split Verdict Details:** A Supreme Court bench delivered a split judgment on the interpretation of provisions under the Prevention of Corruption Act, with judges unable to reach a unanimous conclusion.
- **Core Legal Issue:** The primary disagreement centered on the interpretation of what constitutes "criminal misconduct" by public servants and the evidentiary threshold required to establish corruption charges. Judges differed on whether the prosecution must prove actual corrupt intent or if circumstantial evidence of disproportionate assets is sufficient for conviction.
- **Presumption of Innocence vs. Public Accountability:** The split reflected a fundamental tension between protecting the constitutional presumption of innocence for public officials and ensuring robust mechanisms for detecting and prosecuting corruption.
- **Implications for Pending Cases:** The split verdict creates uncertainty for numerous   pending corruption cases across lower courts, which await authoritative guidance from the Supreme Court. Trial courts and High Courts may face challenges in applying the law consistently until a larger bench settles the interpretational conflicts.
- **Referral to Larger Bench:** Given the fundamental importance of the legal questions and the division of judicial opinion, the matter will be referred to a larger Constitution Bench of five or more judges.

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu Lead NITI Aayog's Export Preparedness Index 2024

In the News: NITI Aayog released the Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024, the fourth edition since its inception in August 2020, providing a comprehensive assessment of export readiness across India's States and Union Territories. The index aligns with India's goal of achieving USD 1 trillion in merchandise exports by 2030 and the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision.

Key Points:

- **Index Overview and Purpose:** The Export Preparedness Index (EPI) 2024 evaluates the strength, resilience, and inclusiveness of subnational export ecosystems across Indian states and UTs.
- **Framework Structure:** The EPI 2024 is structured around four main pillars with 13 sub-pillars and 70 indicators. The four pillars are: Export Infrastructure (20% weightage) covering logistics and utilities, Business Ecosystem including macroeconomy, cost competitiveness, human capital, finance accessibility, MSME ecosystem, and industrial environment, Policy & Governance, and Export Performance (20% weightage) measuring export outcomes, diversification, and global integration.
- **Top Performers - Large States:** Among large states, Maharashtra secured first position, followed by Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Top Performers - Small States and UTs:** In the small states, North Eastern states, and Union Territories category, Uttarakhand emerged as the leader, followed by Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Dadra and Nagar Haveli & Daman and Diu, and Goa. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami attributed the state's success to focus on creating an enabling environment for industry, improving infrastructure, and simplifying procedures.

- **Classification System:** States and UTs are categorized into Large States, Small States, North East States, and Union Territories. Within each category, they are further classified as Leaders (demonstrating high export preparedness), Challengers (moderate preparedness with scope for improvement), and Aspirers (at early stages of export ecosystem development), enabling comparative assessment and peer learning.

IOA Launches National Olympic Education Programme

In the News: The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) launched the National Olympic Education and Development Programme (NOEDP) and formally reactivated the National Olympic Academy (NOA) during its Executive Council meeting on January 8, 2026, with decisions unanimously endorsed at the Annual General Meeting on January 9, 2026, in Ahmedabad.

Key Points:

- **Programme Launch:** The IOA launched the National Olympic Education and Development Programme (NOEDP) as a comprehensive national framework to deliver structured education and development programmes across India's Olympic ecosystem.
- **NOEDP Framework:** The NOEDP is designed to provide education and development opportunities from grassroots to elite levels, implemented in collaboration with National Sports Federations (NSFs) and State Olympic Associations (SOAs).
- **National Olympic Academy Reactivation:** The National Olympic Academy (NOA) has been formally reactivated to serve as the central institution for Olympic education, learning, research, and dialogue in India.
- **Leadership Appointments:** PT Usha, President of the Indian Olympic Association, was unanimously approved as the President of the National Olympic Academy. Gagan Narang, Vice President of the IOA and Olympic medallist, was appointed as the Director of the National Olympic Academy, bringing Olympic experience and leadership to the institution.
- **International Collaboration:** The National Olympic Academy will collaborate closely with the International Olympic Academy in Olympia to align India's Olympic education programmes with the Olympic Charter and international best practices.

MS Sahoo Committee for NPS Reforms

In the News: The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) constituted a high-level 15-member expert committee under the chairmanship of M.S. Sahoo to develop a regulatory framework for assured payouts under the National Pension System (NPS).

Key Points:

- **Committee Constitution and Leadership:** PFRDA established the 15-member expert committee on January 13, 2026, chaired by M.S. Sahoo, Founder of Dr. Sahoo Regulatory Chambers and former Chairperson of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).
- **Primary Mandate and Objectives:** The committee will function as a standing advisory body on structured pension payouts with the central task of designing a regulatory framework for assured payout products under NPS.
- **Tax and Legal Clarity:** An important mandate involves examining the tax treatment of assured payouts, particularly for subscribers who remain within the NPS architecture during the payout phase rather than exiting entirely.
- **Implementation Timeline and Context:** The committee's work follows PFRDA's September 30, 2025 consultation paper on assured pension products. In a separate development, PFRDA issued fresh operational guidelines on January 12, 2026, for data-sharing protocols under the Multiple Scheme Framework (MSF), which allows pension funds to design and manage multiple NPS schemes under their own brand identity.
- **Alignment with Viksit Bharat 2047:** PFRDA stated that the initiative aligns with provisions of the PFRDA Act and the broader national goal of Viksit Bharat 2047. The framework aims to ensure financial independence, stability, and dignity for citizens in their post-retirement years, addressing rising longevity and evolving retirement needs.

Supreme Court Rules Unreserved Seats Open to All Candidates on Merit

In the News: The Supreme Court of India has delivered a landmark judgment clarifying that unreserved seats in educational institutions and employment are open to all candidates, including those from reserved categories, based purely on merit. The ruling reinforces the principle of merit-based selection while protecting the reservation system for designated categories.

Key Points:

- **Court's Ruling:** The Supreme Court held that unreserved or general category seats must remain open to all candidates regardless of their caste or community background. Candidates from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) can compete for unreserved seats based on merit.
- **Merit-Based Selection:** The judgment emphasizes that if candidates from reserved categories qualify for unreserved seats on merit, they must be allocated those seats, and their reserved category quota remains available for other candidates from their community. This prevents wastage of reserved seats while ensuring meritorious candidates are not denied opportunities.
- **Constitutional Framework:** The Court reiterated that reservation is a tool for affirmative action under Articles 15(4), 15(5), and 16(4) of the Constitution, designed to ensure representation for historically disadvantaged groups. However, unreserved seats represent open competition where only merit determines selection, upholding equality under Article 14.
- **Impact on Admissions and Recruitment:** The ruling provides clarity for educational institutions, public sector undertakings, and government departments conducting admissions and recruitments. It ensures transparent implementation of reservation policies while maintaining the integrity of merit-based selection processes.

Dr Jitendra Singh Releases 'Gen V Bano' and 'Mahatma' at India's First NAMO Book Fest

In the News: Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh released two books, 'Gen V Bano' and 'Mahatma', at India's first NAMO Book Fest held in New Delhi. The two-day festival showcases books on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and promotes dialogue among authors, thinkers, and youth on contemporary governance and leadership.

Key Points:

- **Book Releases:** Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, released two significant books at the festival. 'Gen V Bano' and 'Mahatma' were unveiled as part of the literary event celebrating PM Modi's leadership and vision.
- **About NAMO Book Fest:** India's first NAMO Book Fest is a two-day literary festival dedicated to books written on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's life, leadership, policies, and governance model. The festival was organized in New Delhi to bring together authors, scholars, and readers interested in contemporary political leadership.
- **Book Showcasing:** The festival features a comprehensive display of books written about PM Modi in various languages, covering topics ranging from his early life and political journey to policy initiatives like Digital India, Swachh Bharat, and Atmanirbhar Bharat. The collection includes biographies, policy analyses, and leadership studies.
- **Participant Engagement:** The two-day event includes panel discussions, author interactions, book readings, and sessions with writers, journalists, and subject matter experts. Youth participation is particularly encouraged to foster understanding of contemporary governance and nation-building efforts.

GAIL's 694-km Expressway Gas Pipeline: A New Model for India's Infrastructure

In the News: GAIL (India) Limited has completed the 694-km Mumbai–Nagpur Natural Gas Pipeline built inside a narrow 3-metre corridor along Maharashtra's Samruddhi Mahamarg expressway. This innovative project represents a pioneering model for integrating energy infrastructure with highway development in India.

Key Points:

- **Project Completion:** GAIL has successfully constructed the 694-kilometer Mumbai–Nagpur Natural Gas Pipeline running parallel to the Samruddhi Mahamarg (Hindu Hrudaysamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg). The pipeline represents India's first major gas infrastructure built within an expressway corridor.
- **Innovative Design Model:** The pipeline has been laid within a narrow 3-metre Right of Way (RoW) corridor alongside the expressway, demonstrating space-efficient infrastructure development. This integrated approach minimizes land acquisition challenges, reduces environmental impact, and optimizes resource utilization.
- **Land Acquisition Benefits:** By utilizing the expressway corridor, the project avoided the complex and time-consuming process of acquiring separate agricultural or private land for the pipeline. This approach significantly reduced project costs, expedited completion timelines, and minimized displacement of local communities.
- **About Samruddhi Mahamarg:** The Hindu Hrudaysamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg is a 701-km expressway connecting Mumbai and Nagpur. Completed in phases, it reduces travel time between the two cities to approximately 8 hours and promotes regional economic development.

Jharkhand Implements PESA After 25 Years, Sparks Tribal Debate

In the News: Jharkhand has finally implemented the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) after a delay of 25 years since the state's formation. The move aims to empower tribal communities with self-governance rights but has sparked intense debate over its provisions and implementation challenges.

Key Points:

- **Historic Implementation:** Jharkhand has enacted PESA rules 25 years after the state's creation in 2000, despite the central Act being passed in 1996. The implementation grants constitutional recognition to tribal self-governance in scheduled areas covering significant portions of the state.
- **About PESA Act:** The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 extends the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution to Fifth Schedule areas. It empowers Gram Sabhas with authority over natural resources, minor forest produce, local governance, and resolution of disputes through traditional customs.
- **Key Provisions:** PESA grants Gram Sabhas mandatory consultation rights before land acquisition, power to manage minor water bodies and minor minerals, control over intoxicants, ownership of minor forest produce, and authority to prevent land alienation. The Act recognizes traditional tribal governance systems.
- **Coverage in Jharkhand:** The legislation applies to scheduled areas across multiple districts in Jharkhand where tribal populations are concentrated. These areas have significant forest resources and mineral wealth, making land and resource rights particularly crucial.
- **Tribal Perspectives:** While tribal rights activists welcome PESA as a tool for self-determination and resource control, some groups express concerns about dilution of provisions in state rules.

INTERNATIONAL

Italy Honours Shrinivas Dempo with Prestigious Civilian Award

In the News: Noted Goan industrialist and philanthropist Shrinivas Dempo was honored with the 'Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia' – 'Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy' – one of the highest civilian awards of the Republic of Italy. The prestigious honor was conferred by Walter Ferrara, Consul General of Italy in Mumbai, at a special investiture ceremony held in Panaji, Goa. since 2013.

Key Points:

- **The Prestigious Award:** The 'Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia' (Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy) is one of Italy's highest civilian honors. The Order of the Star of Italy was reformed in 2011 from the 1947 Order of the Star of Italian Solidarity by Italy's 11th President, Giorgio Napolitano.
- **Investiture Ceremony Details:** The special investiture ceremony was held in Panaji, Goa, and attended by distinguished dignitaries including Consul General Walter Ferrara and his wife Olga Ferrara; Union Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Shripad Naik; Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Sadanand Tanawade; Minister for Public Works, Digambar Kamat
- **Honorary Vice Consul Position:** Shrinivas Dempo has served as the Honorary Vice Consul of Italy in Goa, India, since 2013. In this capacity, he has been instrumental in handling sensitive cases involving Italian citizens residing in or passing through Goa, facilitating consular services, and promoting cultural and economic exchanges between Italy and Goa.
- **Professional Associations:** Dempo's illustrious career includes serving as immediate Past President of the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI), continuing a three-generation family legacy with the chamber. Additionally, Dempo has served as Chairman of the Western Region of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and President of the All India Management Association (AIMA).

Operation Hawkeye Strike Targets ISIS Across Syria

In the News: The United States launched Operation Hawkeye Strike, a large-scale retaliatory military action against Islamic State (ISIS) targets across Syria, in direct response to a deadly ambush in Palmyra on December 13, 2025, that killed two Iowa National Guard soldiers and a U.S. civilian interpreter. The operation, named to honor the fallen soldiers from the "Hawkeye State" of Iowa, involved coordinated airstrikes utilizing over 100 precision-guided munitions against more than 70 ISIS targets across central and eastern Syria.

Key Points:

- **December 2025 Palmyra Attack:** On December 13, 2025, a Syrian police officer suspected of being affiliated with ISIS carried out an ambush attack against U.S. and Syrian forces conducting a key leader engagement in Palmyra, Syria. This marked the first U.S. military combat deaths in Syria since 2019 and the first casualties since the fall of the Assad regime in late 2024.
- **Initial Strike - December 19, 2025:** Six days after the ambush, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) launched Operation Hawkeye Strike on December 19, 2025, at approximately 12:30 PM Eastern Time. The strikes targeted ISIS infrastructure in the Jabal al-Amour area near Palmyra in Homs province, Ma'adan desert in rural Raqqa, and al-Hammad desert in Deir ez-Zor province.
- **January 10, 2026 Follow-Up Strikes:** According to a U.S. official, this second phase of strikes involved over 90 precision munitions hitting more than 35 targets using over two dozen aircraft.
- **Syrian Government Coordination:** President Ahmed al-Sharaa's government, which joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in November 2025, committed to intensified anti-ISIS efforts through joint operations and intelligence sharing with U.S. forces. Syria praised the strikes for targeting "the hideouts of the ISIS terrorist organization" and preventing the group from regrouping.
- **ISIS Strength Assessment:** According to the latest U.S. intelligence estimates, between 1,500 and 3,000 ISIS militants remain operational across Syria and Iraq, with some analysts suggesting the numbers could be as high as 5,000 to 7,000 fighters.

Nalini Joshi Named New South Wales Scientist of the Year

In the News: Professor Nalini Joshi AO from the University of Sydney was recognized as the New South Wales Scientist of the Year in the 2025 Premier's Prizes for Science and Engineering at Government House in Sydney. Professor Joshi made history by becoming the first mathematician to receive NSW's highest honor for scientific endeavor since the award's inception.

Key Points:
- **Historic Recognition:** Professor Nalini Joshi AO became the first mathematician to win the NSW Scientist of the Year award in its history, marking a significant milestone for mathematical sciences in Australia. The award, part of the NSW Premier's Prizes for Science and Engineering, recognized her as one of 10 exceptional researchers, innovators, and educators honored at the prestigious ceremony.
- **Transformational Mathematical Research:** Professor Joshi's groundbreaking work focuses on integrable systems, particularly the Painlevé equations and their applications. Her transformational mathematical approaches have been applied to reveal real-world phenomena, including how light signals travel in optical fibers and the formation of large, unpredictable surface waves called rogue waves in deep water.
- **Quantum Cryptography Leadership:** In January 2026, she was announced as director of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Mathematics for Quantum Era Security and Trust (MathQuEST), which secured $35 million in federal funding to address the breakdown of existing cybersecurity systems in the age of quantum computing.
- **Previous Honors and Awards:** In 2015, she was named the 150th Anniversary Hardy Lecturer by the London Mathematical Society. She received the Eureka Prize for Outstanding Mentorship of Young Researchers in 2018, was awarded the George Szekeres Medal from the Australian Mathematical Society in 2020, and received the 2021 ANZIAM Medal for "unparalleled contributions to applied mathematics in leadership, gender equity, and promotion of mathematics."
- **Officer of the Order of Australia:** In the 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours, Professor Joshi was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for distinguished service to mathematical science and tertiary education.

Monroe Doctrine reloaded

In the News: U.S. President Donald Trump formally announced the revival of the Monroe Doctrine through what he termed the "Trump Corollary," articulated in the National Security Strategy 2025 released by the White House. The doctrine asserts that "the American people—not foreign nations nor globalist institutions—will always control their own destiny in our hemisphere." On January 3, 2026, this policy was dramatically implemented when U.S. forces captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores in Operation Absolute Resolve.

Key Points:
- **Historical Monroe Doctrine Context:** The original Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed by President James Monroe on December 2, 1823, warning European powers against further colonization or interference in the Western Hemisphere. The policy asserted that the region was no longer open to Old World ambitions and would be regarded as a sphere of U.S. interest.

- **"Donroe Doctrine" Terminology:** During a January 3, 2026 press conference at Mar-a-Lago, President Trump coined the term "Donroe Doctrine" (combining "Donald" and "Monroe"), claiming his administration has "superseded" the 1823 doctrine.
- **Operation Absolute Resolve Details:** The U.S. military operation to capture Maduro began at 10:46 PM ET on January 2, 2026, when Trump gave the final authorization. At approximately 1:01 AM local time on January 3, joint CIA operatives and special operations forces arrived at Maduro's compound in Caracas. By 3:29 AM, Maduro and his wife were aboard a U.S. aircraft.
- **China's Economic Dominance Challenge:** China is now the leading trade partner of every country in South America except Colombia, where it ranks second to the U.S. China's December 2025 Policy Paper explicitly designated Latin America as central to Belt and Road expansion and the Global Development Initiative, prioritizing infrastructure development, manufacturing cooperation, and technology transfer.
- **U.S. Role in Venezuela's Future:** Trump emphasized U.S. leadership in rebuilding Venezuela with particular focus on the oil sector. Venezuela's Vice President Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as interim president on January 5, 2026, by the country's National Assembly.

Indian Army Major Swathi Shantha Kumar Wins UN Secretary-General's Award 2025
In the News: Indian Army Major Swathi Shantha Kumar has been honored with the prestigious UN Secretary-General's Award 2025 in the Gender Category for her exceptional work in gender-inclusive peacekeeping. Serving with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS),
Key Points:
- **Award Recognition:** Major Swathi Shantha Kumar received the UN Secretary-General's Award 2025 in the Gender Category, announced by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The award recognizes initiatives that promote gender parity and gender-responsive peacekeeping, with Major Swathi's project emerging as the top choice through a UN-wide voting process involving personnel from different peacekeeping missions.
- **Project "Equal Partners, Lasting Peace":** Major Swathi led this transformative initiative under the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), focusing on gender-inclusive peacekeeping practices.
- **Leadership Role:** As head of the Indian Engagement Team under UNMISS, Major Swathi demonstrated exemplary leadership in implementing gender-responsive peacekeeping strategies. Her work ensured that women peacekeepers were effectively integrated into operations, improving the mission's ability to engage with local communities and address gender-specific security concerns.
- **Global Recognition for India:** Major Swathi's achievement brings international recognition to India's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations. India is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping, having deployed over 275,000 personnel since 1950, with an increasing number of women peacekeepers serving in challenging conflict zones worldwide.
- **Setting a Global Example:** The "Equal Partners, Lasting Peace" project sets a global benchmark for gender-inclusive peacekeeping practices. Major Swathi's work demonstrates how inclusive leadership and gender-responsive approaches can improve peacekeeping effectiveness, build community trust, and contribute to long-term peace and stability in conflict-affected regions.

ICJ Hearings Begin in Rohingya Genocide Case Against Myanmar
In the News: The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague has commenced substantive hearings in the landmark genocide case against Myanmar concerning the treatment of the Rohingya Muslim minority. The case, originally filed by The Gambia in 2019, examines allegations of genocide and violations of the Genocide Convention during Myanmar's military crackdown in Rakhine State in 2016-2017.
Key Points:
- **Case Background:** The Gambia filed the case at the ICJ in November 2019 on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), accusing Myanmar of violating the 1948 Genocide Convention. The allegations focus on the Myanmar military's brutal campaign against the Rohingya population in Rakhine State.
- **Rohingya Crisis Overview:** In August 2017, Myanmar's military launched a violent crackdown in response to attacks by Rohingya militants, resulting in mass killings, sexual violence, and the burning of hundreds of villages. Over 740,000 Rohingya fled to neighboring Bangladesh, creating one of the world's largest refugee crises.

- **Genocide Allegations:** The case alleges that Myanmar committed acts including mass murder, rape, torture, and destruction of Rohingya communities with the intent to destroy the Rohingya ethnic group in whole or in part. Evidence includes eyewitness testimonies, satellite imagery, and reports from UN investigators.
- **International Support:** Multiple countries have intervened in the case or filed declarations of support, including Canada, the Netherlands, and the Maldives. Civil society organizations and Rohingya advocacy groups have also submitted evidence and amicus briefs to support the proceedings.
- **Parallel Proceedings:** Separately, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is conducting its own investigation into crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya. Argentina has also initiated criminal proceedings under universal jurisdiction against Myanmar officials.
- **Refugee Situation:** Meanwhile, approximately one million Rohingya refugees remain in camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, living in difficult conditions with limited prospects for return. The international community continues to seek durable solutions for the displaced population.

After a month on the sidelines, US brings India into Pax Silica: What changed, why does it matter?

In the News: Newly appointed US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor announced that India will be invited to join the Pax Silica initiative, approximately one month after India was notably excluded when the US-led strategic framework was launched on December 12, 2025. This reversal marks a significant shift in US-India technology cooperation and comes amid ongoing negotiations for a bilateral trade deal.

Key Points:

- **Pax Silica Initiative Overview:** Pax Silica is a US-led strategic initiative focused on securing AI and technology supply chains by bringing together "friendly and trusted" countries. According to the US State Department, the framework aims to ensure key technologies are safe, reliable, and not controlled by hostile players, serving as a counter to China's grip on global manufacturing supply chains.
- **Initial Exclusion of India:** When Pax Silica was formally launched on December 12, 2025, India was surprisingly left out despite being a key technology partner. The founding members included US allies such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Australia.
- **India's Invitation After One Month:** US Ambassador Sergio Gor extended the invitation to India on January 13, 2026, approximately one month after the initiative's launch.
- **Technology and Infrastructure Benefits:** The initiative will help India build trusted technology ecosystems, including Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems, fiber-optic cables, data centers, foundational models, and applications.

Meta Names Former Trump Adviser Dina Powell McCormick as President and Vice Chairman

In the News: Meta announced the appointment of Dina Powell McCormick, a former Trump administration adviser and veteran finance executive, as president and vice chairman of the company. This move strengthens Meta's ties with the Trump administration and signals the company's focus on AI expansion and global strategy.

Key Points:

- **Responsibilities:** In her new management role, Powell McCormick will guide Meta's overall strategy, including the execution of multi-billion-dollar investments and accelerating the company's artificial intelligence initiatives across platforms.
- **Political Background:** Powell McCormick served as a deputy national security adviser during Trump's first term and held roles in the White House and Secretary of State's office under President George W. Bush. She is married to U.S. Senator David McCormick.
- **Finance Expertise:** She brings extensive financial experience, having spent 16 years in senior leadership at Goldman Sachs and most recently serving as vice chair, president, and head of global client services at BDT & MSD Partners.
- **Presidential Endorsement:** President Donald Trump praised the appointment on Truth Social, calling it a "great choice" by Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and noting Powell McCormick's service to his administration "with strength and distinction."
- **Meta-Trump Relations:** The appointment is part of broader efforts by Meta to strengthen ties with the Trump administration. Other recent moves include CEO Mark Zuckerberg dining with Trump at the White House, announcing massive U.S. investment promises, and appointing UFC CEO Dana White to Meta's board.

India to Host 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth

In the News: India is set to host the 28th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC), bringing together parliamentary leaders from Commonwealth nations. This prestigious conference provides a platform for sharing best practices in parliamentary democracy, legislative procedures, and governance among member countries, reinforcing India's commitment to democratic values and its leadership role within the Commonwealth.

Key Points:

- **Conference Overview:** The 28th CSPOC will convene Speakers and Presiding Officers from parliaments and legislatures across the 56 Commonwealth member nations. The conference serves as a premier forum for exchanging experiences, discussing contemporary parliamentary challenges, and strengthening democratic institutions across the Commonwealth.
- **Host Responsibilities:** India's Parliament, through the Lok Sabha Secretariat and Rajya Sabha Secretariat, will organize the conference. The event will likely be hosted in New Delhi, showcasing India's parliamentary traditions and institutional infrastructure to international delegates.
- **Thematic Focus Areas:** Expected discussion topics include digital transformation of parliaments, ensuring gender balance in legislative bodies, youth participation in democracy, climate change legislation, cybersecurity and data protection laws, parliamentary oversight mechanisms, and adapting parliamentary procedures to contemporary challenges.
- **Commonwealth Parliamentary Association:** The conference operates under the aegis of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), an organization that connects parliamentarians across the Commonwealth. India has been an active CPA member since its inception and has contributed significantly to Commonwealth parliamentary traditions.
- **Diplomatic Significance:** The conference strengthens India's diplomatic engagement with Commonwealth nations, many of which are strategic partners in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

Golden Globes 2026: Full List of Winners and Key Highlights

In the News: The 83rd Golden Globe Awards ceremony took place on January 5, 2026, honouring excellence in film and television from 2025. Hosted by comedian Nikki Glaser at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, California, the star-studded event celebrated outstanding performances, groundbreaking storytelling, and creative achievements across cinema and streaming platforms, setting the stage for the upcoming awards season.

In the News: The 83rd Golden Globe Awards ceremony took place on January 11, 2026, honoring excellence in film and television from 2025. Hosted by comedian Nikki Glaser for the second consecutive year at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, California, the star-studded event celebrated outstanding performances, groundbreaking storytelling, and creative achievements across cinema and streaming platforms. The ceremony showcased a diverse range of winners, with "One Battle After Another" and "Adolescence" dominating the film and television categories respectively, setting the stage for the upcoming awards season.

Key Points:

- **Best Motion Picture - Drama:** "Hamnet" won the prestigious award for Best Motion Picture - Drama, with the film also earning recognition for its lead actress Jessie Buckley. The period drama garnered critical acclaim for its literary adaptation and compelling performances, establishing itself as a major contender in the awards season.
- **Best Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy:** "One Battle After Another" claimed the top honor in the Musical or Comedy category, leading all films with four total awards. Director Paul Thomas Anderson's revolutionary thriller also won Best Director, Best Supporting Actress for Teyana Taylor, and Best Screenplay, demonstrating the film's comprehensive excellence across multiple creative dimensions.
- **Best Director:** Paul Thomas Anderson won Best Director for "One Battle After Another," adding to his distinguished career of filmmaking achievements. The award recognized his bold vision in crafting what has been described as a gonzo revolutionary thriller that pushed creative boundaries.
- **Acting Honors - Drama:** Wagner Moura won Best Actor in a Motion Picture - Drama for his performance in "The Secret Agent," while Jessie Buckley received Best Actress in a Motion Picture - Drama for "Hamnet," both delivering powerful and emotionally resonant performances that captivated audiences and critics alike.
- **Acting Honors - Musical or Comedy:** Timothée Chalamet won Best Actor in a Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy for "Marty Supreme," and Rose Byrne received Best Actress in a Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy for "If I Had Legs I'd Kick You," showcasing versatile performances across different genres and demonstrating their range as performers.

- **Supporting Performance Awards:** Stellan Skarsgård won Best Supporting Actor for "Sentimental Value," while Teyana Taylor took home Best Supporting Actress for "One Battle After Another," both recognized for delivering standout performances that elevated their respective films and contributed to the overall storytelling.
- **Animated Film Excellence: "**K-Pop Demon Hunters" won Best Motion Picture - Animated, the Netflix animated sensation about a demon-fighting K-pop girl group that broke global streaming records. The film also won Best Original Song for "Golden," with songwriter and singer EJAE delivering an emotional acceptance speech about perseverance and self-acceptance.
- **Television Dominance: "**Adolescence" dominated the television categories with four major wins, including Best Limited or Anthology Series or Television Film, Best Actor for Stephen Graham, Best Supporting Actor for Owen Cooper, and Best Supporting Actress for Erin Doherty. The series demonstrated exceptional storytelling and performances across its ensemble cast.

Israel Withdraws from Seven UN Agencies Over Alleged Bias

In the News: Israel has announced its withdrawal from seven United Nations agencies, citing what it describes as systematic bias and anti-Israel positions within these international organizations. This dramatic move represents a significant escalation in Israel's strained relationship with parts of the UN system and reflects broader tensions between Israel and international institutions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and related humanitarian issues.

Key Points:

- **Agencies Affected:** While specific agencies vary in reports, the withdrawal likely impacts organizations dealing with human rights monitoring, refugee assistance, cultural preservation, educational programs, and humanitarian coordination.
- **Israeli Justifications:** Israel argues that these UN agencies consistently single out Israel for criticism while ignoring human rights violations elsewhere, operate with predetermined anti-Israel agendas, undermine Israel's sovereignty and security interests, politicize humanitarian issues for partisan purposes.
- **Humanitarian Impact:** The withdrawal, particularly from agencies like UNRWA, raises serious concerns about the provision of essential services to Palestinian refugees including education for hundreds of thousands of children, healthcare services, food assistance, and emergency relief.
- **Broader UN-Israel Relations:** This withdrawal intensifies Israel's longstanding tensions with UN institutions. Israel has previously criticized the UN Human Rights Council, withdrawn from UNESCO in 2018 (before potentially rejoining), and frequently clashed with UN officials over resolutions and reports concerning Israeli policies in Palestinian territories and settlement construction.

India Ranks 80th in World's Strongest Passport Index

In the News: India has improved its position to 80th rank in the Henley Passport Index 2026, released on Tuesday, moving up from the 85th position held in 2025. The Indian passport now grants visa-free entry to 55 destinations worldwide out of 227 assessed destinations, reflecting gradual progress in India's global mobility and strengthening diplomatic relations with other nations.

Key Points:

- **India's Ranking Improvement:** India climbed five positions from 85th rank in 2025 to 80th rank in 2026 on the Henley Passport Index. The Indian passport provides visa-free or visa-on-arrival access to 55 destinations globally, representing modest but steady improvement in travel freedom for Indian citizens.
- **Top-Ranking Passports:** Singapore retained its position as the world's most powerful passport for the third consecutive year, offering visa-free entry to 192 out of 227 destinations. Japan and South Korea tied for second place with access to 188 destinations, while Denmark, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland shared third position with 186 destinations.
- **European Dominance:** European nations continue to dominate the upper ranks of the index. Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Norway shared fourth spot with visa-free entry to 185 destinations, while Hungary, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the UAE completed the top five positions with access to 184 destinations.
- **Regional Comparison:** Within South Asia, India's 80th rank positions it ahead of neighboring Pakistan, which improved from 103rd to 98th position but remains near the bottom of rankings with visa-free access to just 31 destinations. Pakistan continues to languish alongside Yemen at the lower end of the index.

- **Weakest Passports:** Only Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan ranked below Pakistan in the Henley Passport Index 2026, highlighting how conflict, security concerns, and diplomatic isolation severely restrict travel freedom for citizens of these nations.

China rejects India's claim over Shaksgam valley in Kashmir, asserts territory belongs to Beijing

In the News: China rejected India's territorial claim over the Shaksgam Valley in Kashmir, asserting that the region belongs to Beijing.

Key Points:

- **Chinese Assertion:** China's foreign ministry spokesperson rejected India's claim over the Shaksgam Valley, stating that the region is Chinese territory. Beijing asserted that the boundary question between China and India does not involve the Shaksgam Valley, which it considers part of the Xinjiang region.
- **India's Position:** India maintains that the Shaksgam Valley, covering approximately 5,180 square kilometers, is an integral part of Indian territory in Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian government consistently asserts that Pakistan illegally ceded this region to China through the 1963 Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement, which India has never recognized.
- **Historical Background:** The Shaksgam Valley was under Pakistani control after the 1947-48 India-Pakistan war and was subsequently ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963. The agreement demarcated the border between China's Xinjiang region and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, transferring the valley to Chinese control despite India's protests.
- **Strategic Significance:** The Shaksgam Valley holds strategic importance as it connects China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and provides access to the Karakoram Highway. The region is also significant for its proximity to the Siachen Glacier and its role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- **Broader Border Dispute Context:** This development comes amid ongoing border tensions between India and China, particularly following the 2020 Galwan Valley clash. The two countries have been engaged in military and diplomatic talks to resolve standoffs along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

India Surpasses China in Rice Production

In the News: India has overtaken China to become the world's largest rice producer, marking a significant milestone in global agriculture. The development has major implications for global food security and India's position in international rice trade.

Key Points:

- **Production Figures:** India's annual rice production has crossed approximately 150 million tonnes, while China's production has remained around 145 million tonnes but with declining trends. India's consistent growth in rice cultivation, particularly in states like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh, has contributed to this achievement.
- **Contributing Factors:** The surge in India's rice production is attributed to several factors including expanded cultivation area, adoption of high-yielding variety (HYV) seeds, improved irrigation facilities, and government support through minimum support price (MSP) mechanisms.
- **Agricultural Reforms:** Government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) and various state-level irrigation projects have enhanced water availability for paddy cultivation. The promotion of direct seeded rice (DSR) technology and the use of modern farming equipment have improved productivity and efficiency.
- **Export Implications:** India is already the world's largest rice exporter, accounting for over 40% of global rice trade. The increased production strengthens India's position in international markets, particularly in exporting basmati and non-basmati varieties to countries across Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

US Freezes Immigrant Visa Processing for 75 Countries Under Trump Administration

In the News: The Trump administration announced an indefinite freeze on immigrant visa processing for 75 countries, affecting nearly 40% of the world's nations. The State Department justified the suspension by claiming that immigrants from these countries take welfare from the American people at unacceptable rates.

Key Points:

- **Announcement and Implementation:** The State Department announced on January 14, 2026, that it will pause immigrant visa processing for 75 countries beginning January 21, 2026. State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott stated that the administration is bringing an end to the abuse of America's immigration system by those who would extract wealth from American citizens.

- **Countries Affected:** The 75 countries include US allies and adversaries across multiple regions. Confirmed countries include Somalia, Russia, Afghanistan, Brazil, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Nigeria, Thailand, Yemen, Haiti, Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Jamaica, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Lucia. The list spans Latin America and the Caribbean, the Balkans, South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, representing nearly 40% of the world's countries.
- **Scope of the Freeze:** The freeze does not apply to non-immigrant visas such as student visas, tourist visas, business visas, or temporary work visas. This distinction is significant with the 2026 FIFA World Cup (co-hosted by the US, Canada, and Mexico) and the 2028 Olympics approaching, when demand for non-immigrant visas is expected to rise dramatically.
- **Green Card Reexamination:** Joseph Edlow, director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, announced in November 2025 a full-scale reexamination of every green card issued to individuals from countries of concern under the Biden administration.
- **Impact on Legal Immigration:** According to Aaron Reichlin-Melnick of the American Immigration Council, when combined with existing travel bans, the Trump administration has now banned or suspended immigrant visas for 90 different countries, including 70% of African nations.

Pentagon Pizza Index: Why a Food Meme Is Trending Amid US–Iran Tensions

In the News: The Pentagon Pizza Index surged into trending discussions amid escalating US-Iran tensions, with reports of approx. 222% spike in pizza orders near the Pentagon on January 5, 2026. The informal intelligence indicator, which tracks late-night pizza deliveries to government buildings as a signal of unusual military activity, shifted from "nothing ever happens" to "something might happen" on January 14, 2026.

Key Points:

- **What is the Pentagon Pizza Index:** The Pentagon Pizza Index (also called the Pizza Meter) is an open-source intelligence theory suggesting that late-night pizza orders near US government buildings spike before major geopolitical events. The logic is that when Pentagon, CIA, or White House staff work through the night on developing crises, they order food, making pizza deliveries an observable signal of unusual activity.
- **Historical Precedents:** The theory has coincided with several major events. In August 1990, the CIA ordered 21 pizzas in a single night before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the following day. During the December 1998 impeachment hearings of Bill Clinton and Operation Desert Fox, the White House ordered 32% more extra-cheese pizzas than normal, totaling $11,600 in Capitol Hill orders.
- **Recent Spikes and Events:** On June 22, 2025, high activity was reported at a Papa John's one hour before Trump announced US strikes on Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities. Between late January 2 and early January 3, 2026, unusually high activity preceded the United States strikes in Venezuela and the capture of Nicolás Maduro.
- **January 2026 Surge:** On January 5, 2026, social media reported a 1,250% surge in pizza orders near the Pentagon, nearly double the spike observed before the Venezuela operation days earlier. On January 14, 2026, the Pentagon Pizza Index shifted from "nothing ever happens" to "something might happen" amid growing speculation about a possible US strike on Iran.
- **Companion Indicator - Gay Bar Index:** Similar to the Pentagon pizza observation, gay bars in Washington, D.C., reportedly see abnormally low traffic on nights when Pentagon workers stay late. This has become a companion indicator, with both the pizza index and gay bar index described as accidental barometers of a state preparing military action while official channels remain silent.

WEF Global Risks Report 2026

In the News: The World Economic Forum released its Global Risks Report 2026, the 21st edition of this annual analysis. The report, based on insights from over 1,300 global experts, identifies geoeconomic confrontation as the top short-term risk, marking a significant shift toward an "age of competition" characterized by fragmentation and confrontation. Half of respondents expect turbulent or stormy conditions over the next two years, rising to 57% for the 10-year outlook.

Key Points:

- **Report Overview and Methodology:** The Global Risks Report 2026 is the 21st edition of the annual WEF risk analysis, surveying over 1,300 leaders and experts from business, government, academia, and civil society. The report analyzes global risks through three timeframes: immediate term (2026), short-to-medium term (to 2028), and long term (to 2036). Chapter 1 presents findings from the Global Risks Perception Survey, while Chapter 2 explores implications through six in-depth thematic analyses.

- **Top Short-Term Risk - Geoeconomic Confrontation:** Geoeconomic confrontation ranks as the top risk most likely to trigger a global crisis in 2026, selected by 18% of respondents and climbing eight positions from last year. This includes the use of economic tools such as sanctions, tariffs, regulations, supply chain controls, and capital constraints.
- **Heightened Uncertainty and Pessimism:** Uncertainty defines the 2026 outlook, with 50% of respondents anticipating turbulent or stormy conditions over the next two years, up 14 percentage points from last year. Only 1% expect calm conditions in both the short and long term. Over the next decade, 57% foresee turbulent or stormy times, with nearly one-fifth anticipating global catastrophic risks.
- **Technological Risks Growing Unchecked:** Misinformation and disinformation ranks #2 in the two-year outlook, remaining an acute concern, while cyber insecurity ranks #6. Adverse outcomes of AI shows the largest rise across timeframes, moving from #30 in the two-year outlook to #5 in the 10-year outlook.
- **Environmental Risks Deprioritized Short-Term:** Environmental risks experienced significant declines in the two-year outlook compared to previous years. Extreme weather events dropped from #2 to #4, critical change to Earth systems declined seven positions to #24, and biodiversity loss dropped five positions to #26.

Finke River Recognised as the World's Oldest Flowing River
In the News: Scientists have identified Australia's Finke River as the world's oldest surviving river system, dating back 300–400 million years to the Devonian or Carboniferous period. Flowing through the MacDonnell Ranges in central Australia, the river offers rare insights into Earth's deep geological history and represents a living remnant from before the age of dinosaurs.
Key Points:
- **Age and Recognition:** The Finke River is believed to be the world's oldest river system, with origins dating between 300 and 400 million years ago during the Devonian (419–359 million years ago) or Carboniferous (359–299 million years ago) period. Geological records, weathering profiles, and radionuclide measurements in surrounding sediments and rocks have enabled scientists to date this ancient river system.
- **Indigenous Name and Location:** Known to the Arrernte people as Larapinta, the river flows through Australia's Northern Territory and South Australia. It stretches for over 640 kilometers (approximately 600 km or 370 miles), running from the MacDonnell Ranges toward the Simpson Desert.
- **Course and Origin:** The river originates in the MacDonnell Ranges where two smaller creeks, Davenport and Ormiston, meet. Main tributaries include Ellery Creek and the Palmer and Hugh Rivers. During major floods, its water can reach the Macumba River and eventually Lake Eyre.
- **Unique Geological Feature - Antecedence:** The Finke River cuts straight through the hard rock MacDonnell Ranges rather than flowing around them, demonstrating a phenomenon called "antecedence." The river was already flowing before the mountains rose during the Alice Springs Orogeny (300–400 million years ago).
- **Intermittent Flow Pattern:** Unlike most rivers, the Finke does not flow continuously year-round. Most of the time, it appears as a series of scattered waterholes across the desert landscape. Only after heavy rainfall does it transform into a powerful, fast-flowing continuous river, demonstrating its ephemeral nature in one of Earth's most arid regions.

WEF Global Risks Report 2026
In the News: The World Economic Forum (WEF) released its Global Risks Report 2026 ahead of its annual event in Davos, identifying the world as entering an "Age of Competition" marked by intensifying geoeconomic rivalry, societal polarization, and technological disruption.
Key Points:
- **Report Framework:** The Global Risks Report 2026 assesses risks across three time horizons: immediate (2026), short-to-medium term (to 2028), and long term (to 2036). The report reveals a significant reprioritization of threats, with 50 per cent of respondents anticipating either a "turbulent" or "stormy" period globally, reflecting unprecedented uncertainty in the international landscape.
- **Top Short-Term Risk - Geoeconomic Confrontation:** Geoeconomic confrontation has emerged as the number one short-term global risk for 2026, with 18 per cent of survey respondents selecting it as most likely to trigger a material global crisis.
- **Economic Instability Concerns:** Economic risks have intensified sharply, with concerns about economic downturn, inflation, and potential asset bubbles recording the largest increases in ranking over the two-year horizon compared to last year. Despite International Monetary Fund projections of 3.1 per cent global GDP growth in 2026, the balance of risks tilts to the downside due to high public and private debt levels and volatile financial markets.

- **Shifting Climate Risk Perception:** Extreme weather events, ranked first or second as the most significant risk for four consecutive years, have fallen to fourth place for the upcoming two-year period. Climate action failure has not been perceived as a top global risk since 2024.
- **Inequality as Interconnected Risk:** Inequality was identified as the most interconnected global risk for the second consecutive year, closely linked to economic instability, misinformation, and declining trust in institutions.

SCIENCE AND TECH

ISRO to launch EOS-N1
In the News: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the PSLV-C62 mission carrying the advanced Earth observation satellite EOS-N1 (Anvesha) at 10:18:30 AM IST from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. This marked ISRO's first launch of 2026 and the 64th flight of India's workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). The mission, conducted by NewSpace India Limited (NSIL).
Key Points:
- **Mission Overview:** The PSLV-C62 mission lifted off from the First Launch Pad at Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, marking India's first space launch of 2026. The 260-tonne rocket used the PSLV-DL variant configuration with two solid strap-on boosters. This is the 9th dedicated commercial mission undertaken by NewSpace India Limited (NSIL), ISRO's commercial arm.
- **Primary Payload - EOS-N1 (Anvesha):** The primary satellite EOS-N1, codenamed "Anvesha," is a hyperspectral imaging satellite weighing approximately 400 kg, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The satellite operates at 600 km altitude in sun-synchronous polar orbit with a spatial resolution of 12 metres.
- **Strategic Defence Applications:** EOS-N1 significantly enhances India's space-based surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. It provides round-the-clock monitoring of India's borders with Pakistan and China, particularly along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh and Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir, without risking soldiers' lives.
- **Kestrel Initial Demonstrator (KID):** A unique payload on this mission is the 25 kg Kestrel Initial Demonstrator (KID) capsule developed by Spanish startup Orbital Paradigm. This spherical capsule is designed to test controlled re-entry technology and will splash down in the South Pacific Ocean after the PSLV's fourth stage performs a de-boost maneuver.
- **Return to Flight Mission:** This launch represents a critical comeback for ISRO after the PSLV-C61 mission experienced a partial failure in May 2025, when a technical anomaly in the rocket's third stage prevented the EOS-09 satellite from reaching its intended orbit.

DRDO Successfully Tests Indigenous MPATGM with Top-Attack Capability
In the News: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) recently achieved a major milestone by successfully testing the indigenously developed Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) with advanced top-attack capabilities. This achievement marks a significant step toward India's self-reliance in defense technology and enhances the Indian Army's anti-armor warfare capabilities.
Key Points:
- **Successful Test Fire:** DRDO conducted successful flight tests of the MPATGM from a man-portable launcher at the Ahmednagar field firing range in Maharashtra. The missile demonstrated precision strike capability and successfully engaged simulated armored targets.
- **Top-Attack Feature:** The MPATGM is equipped with a unique top-attack mode, allowing it to strike tanks and armored vehicles from above where their armor is weakest. This capability significantly increases the missile's lethality against modern battle tanks with heavily armored fronts and sides.
- **Indigenous Development:** The missile has been indigenously designed and developed by DRDO in collaboration with industry partners. It features a state-of-the-art Imaging Infrared Radar (IIR) seeker with advanced target acquisition and tracking algorithms for day and night operations.
- **Operational Advantage:** The weapon system enhances infantry capabilities against enemy armored formations in diverse terrain conditions. Its man-portable nature makes it ideal for deployment in mountainous regions and difficult terrain where heavier anti-tank systems cannot be easily positioned.

- **Self-Reliance in Defense:** The successful development of MPATGM aligns with the government's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India) initiative in the defense sector. It reduces dependence on imported anti-tank guided missiles and strengthens indigenous defense manufacturing capabilities.

One Satellite Survives PSLV-C62 Failure, Sends Data Briefly

In the News: The PSLV-C62 mission encountered a critical failure during its launch, resulting in satellites being deployed into incorrect orbits. Despite the setback, one satellite managed to survive and briefly transmitted data before contact was lost, providing valuable insights into the mission's final moments and demonstrating the resilience of satellite systems even under adverse conditions.

Key Points:

- **PSLV-C62 Mission Failure:** The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C62), operated by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), experienced a significant anomaly during its launch sequence. The failure prevented the satellites from reaching their intended orbital parameters.
- **Incorrect Orbit Deployment:** The satellites aboard PSLV-C62 were deployed into an incorrect orbit due to the launch vehicle malfunction. This resulted in the satellites being placed at altitudes or trajectories different from the planned mission profile, compromising their operational capabilities.
- **Survivor Satellite:** Among the payloads, one satellite managed to activate and establish brief communication with ground stations despite the orbital anomaly. This represented a partial success amid the overall mission failure, showcasing robust satellite design and autonomous systems.
- **ISRO's Investigation:** Following the mission failure, ISRO has initiated a comprehensive investigation to identify the root cause of the anomaly. Analysis of the available data, including telemetry from the launch vehicle and the brief satellite transmission, will be critical to understanding what went wrong.
- **Impact on Payloads:** The PSLV-C62 was carrying multiple satellites, likely including both ISRO payloads and commercial or international customer satellites. The mission failure represents a setback for these satellite programs and their intended applications.

Google Launches Translate Gemma Open Translation Models

In the News: Google introduced TranslateGemma, a new collection of open translation models built on Gemma 3. The models support translation across 55 languages and are available in three parameter sizes: 4B, 12B, and 27B. The launch came shortly after OpenAI released ChatGPT Translate, positioning Google's offering as an open-source alternative with local deployment capabilities.

Key Points:

- **Model Launch and Availability:** Google released TranslateGemma on January 15, 2026, as part of its Gemma 3 model family. The models are available in three sizes—4B, 12B, and 27B parameters—designed for different deployment needs from mobile devices to cloud systems. The models can be downloaded on Kaggle, Hugging Face, Google Colab, and deployed in Vertex AI, along with comprehensive technical documentation.
- **Language Support:** TranslateGemma supports translation across 55 fully tested languages, including high-resource languages like Spanish, French, Chinese, and Hindi, as well as low-resource languages such as Icelandic and Swahili. The models are already trained on nearly 500 additional language pairs for future updates and research, though evaluation results for these extended pairs have not yet been confirmed.
- **Superior Performance with Efficiency:** The 12B TranslateGemma model outperforms the larger Gemma 3 27B baseline when measured on the WMT24++ benchmark using MetricX, achieving a score of 3.60 compared to 3.09 for the baseline.
- **Multimodal Translation Capabilities:** TranslateGemma retains the multimodal capabilities of Gemma 3, enabling translation of text within images without any additional multimodal training.
- **Open-Source Positioning:** TranslateGemma uses the Gemma Terms of Use, which Google labels as "Open Weights" rather than traditional open-source licensing due to additional restrictions. The license allows commercial use, modification, and redistribution but prohibits certain applications under Google's Prohibited Use Policy

ENVIRONMENT

Why Himachal's first satellite mountain township is being opposed by residents

In the News: The proposed Jathiya Devi Township Project near Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, has triggered widespread opposition from local residents fearing displacement and loss of livelihoods. On January 10, 2026, Gram Panchayat Bagi passed an unopposed resolution rejecting land acquisition for the project, which was first conceptualized in 2014 but has faced repeated delays due to funding constraints.

Key Points:

- **Project Overview:** The Jathiya Devi Township is an ambitious urban development project to be executed by the Himachal Pradesh Housing and Urban Development Authority (HIMUDA). It was conceived in 2014 with central government approval and is envisioned as a planned satellite mountain township to ease pressure on Shimla and promote sustainable, disaster-resilient urban growth.
- **Strategic Location:** The township is located about 14 km from Shimla city, along State Highway 16 and National Highway 5, approximately 3–4 km from Shimla Airport at Jubbarhatti and 20–22 km from ISBT Shimla. The terrain ranges between 1,300 and 1,500 metres above sea level.
- **Project Scale:** The township will span around 249 hectares (approximately 2,959 bighas), of which 35 hectares is government-owned land. The proposed development includes residential zones (55.16 ha) for HIG, MIG, LIG, and EWS categories; commercial areas (13.36 ha); non-polluting industrial zones (15.7 ha); recreational and green zones (16.42 ha); and river development areas (16.56 ha).
- **Phase 1 Development:** The first phase proposes 895 residential units across all income categories, along with commercial and industrial components over 84.22 hectares. Green and river development zones will cover another 33 hectares.
- **Affected Villages:** Eight villages have been identified for acquisition: Chanan (568 bighas), Panti (109 bighas), Aanji (396 bighas), Shilli Baghi (699 bighas), Majhola (78 bighas), Shilru (214 bighas), Dhanokari (270 bighas), and Kyaragi (303 bighas). Additionally, Manjiyari village (441 bighas) in Solan district has also been identified.

Conservation of Grasslands

In the News: The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP), recognizing the essential role these landscapes and communities play in global sustainability, biodiversity, and food security. The Canadian Forage and Grassland Association (CFGA) has announced its commitment to celebrate and promote this initiative throughout the year.

Key Points:

- **Global Significance:** Rangelands – spanning grasslands, savannahs, deserts, and shrublands – support more than 500 million people worldwide and play a critical role in soil and water conservation, climate resilience, and cultural heritage preservation.
- **Pastoralist Contributions:** The IYRP highlights the essential contributions of pastoralists who raise animals on extensive rangelands using adaptive, knowledge-rich systems developed over generations. These systems are recognized as models of resilience in a changing climate.
- **Canada's Grassland Ecosystem:** Canada's grasslands are among the most threatened ecosystems in the country, yet they remain vital to agricultural productivity, wildlife habitat, and carbon storage. Canadian ranchers and forage producers manage landscapes that support biodiversity and ecological function.
- **Alignment with Global Values:** Canadian ranchers, graziers, and forage producers embody pastoralist principles including flexibility, mobility, and deep understanding of the land. They manage variability, adapt to drought, and steward landscapes sustainably.
- **Call to Action:** The IYRP serves not just as a celebration but as a call to action. As global attention turns to rangelands, Canada has an opportunity to showcase leadership in sustainable grazing and forage management.

Andhra Pradesh to Host World's Largest Green Ammonia Project at Kakinada

In the News: The Andhra Pradesh government announced that the state will host India's first and the world's largest green ammonia project in Kakinada. Led by AM Green with a $10 billion investment, the project aims to produce 1.5 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of green ammonia by 2030.

Key Points:

- **Project Announcement:** The Andhra Pradesh government announced on January 16, 2026, that AM Green will establish the world's largest green ammonia project at Kakinada with a $10 billion investment. The project represents one of the largest clean-energy investments ever made in India and will position the country as a global leader in green hydrogen and ammonia production.
- **Production Capacity and Timeline:** The Green Hydrogen and Green Ammonia Complex will have a planned capacity of 1.5 MTPA. Phased commissioning includes 0.5 MTPA by 2027, 1.0 MTPA by 2028, and full capacity of 1.5 MTPA by 2030.
- **Renewable Energy Infrastructure:** The project will be powered by approximately 7.5 GW of renewable energy from solar and wind sources. Energy storage requirements will be met through pumped hydro projects, including approximately 1 GW from the Pinnapuram pumped storage project in Andhra Pradesh.
- **Export Markets:** This marks India's first-ever export of green energy molecules, with green ammonia being exported to Germany, Singapore, and Japan. AM Green has entered into long-term supply agreements with leading global players, including Uniper (Germany), and is engaged with major companies in Japan and Singapore.
- **Environmental and Strategic Impact:** Green ammonia is produced using renewable electricity and green hydrogen, eliminating carbon emissions associated with conventional ammonia production.

APPOINTMENTS

First Indian Appointed to Chair the ABDM

In the News: Senior Indian diplomat DB Venkatesh Varma has been nominated by the UN Secretary General to chair the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (ABDM) for the 2026–27 term. This historic appointment marks the first time an Indian has been selected to lead this prestigious UN advisory body.

Key Points:

- **Historic Appointment:** DB Venkatesh Varma becomes the first Indian diplomat to chair the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (ABDM), appointed by the UN Secretary General for the 2026–27 term. This milestone underscores India's significant role in international peace and security matters and recognition of its expertise in disarmament issues.
- **About DB Venkatesh Varma:** DB Venkatesh Varma is a distinguished Indian Foreign Service officer with extensive experience in multilateral diplomacy and disarmament affairs.
- **ABDM Overview:** The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters is a high-level advisory body established by the UN Secretary General to provide expert advice on disarmament and arms control issues.
- **Key Responsibilities:** As Chair, Varma will lead ABDM's deliberations on critical disarmament issues including nuclear weapons control, conventional arms regulation, weapons of mass destruction and emerging technologies in warfare.
- **India's Disarmament Position:** India has consistently advocated for universal, non-discriminatory, and verifiable nuclear disarmament while maintaining its strategic autonomy. The country supports the complete elimination of nuclear weapons through a step-by-step process and has maintained a credible minimum deterrence doctrine with a no-first-use policy.

Centre Appoints Rakesh Aggarwal as New Director General of NIA

In the News: The Central Government appointed Rakesh Aggarwal as the new Director General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's premier counter-terrorism investigation agency.

Key Points:

- **Appointment Details:** Rakesh Aggarwal has been appointed as the Director General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) by the Central Government. The appointment was made through the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), following established protocols for selecting heads of premier investigative agencies.
- **About NIA:** The National Investigation Agency is India's central counter-terrorism law enforcement agency, established in 2009 following the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. The NIA operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs and has jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute offences related to terrorism, cross-border crimes, organized crime, and threats to national security across India.
- **Key Responsibilities:** As Director General, Aggarwal will oversee NIA's investigations into terror-related activities, cross-border smuggling networks, narco-terrorism, cyber terrorism, and radicalization cases.

- **Operational Mandate:** Under Aggarwal's leadership, the NIA will continue to strengthen its investigative capabilities, enhance inter-agency coordination, and leverage technology for intelligence gathering and evidence collection. The agency works closely with the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, and state Anti-Terrorism Squads.

Centre Appoints Shatrujeet Singh Kapoor as ITBP Chief; Praveen Kumar to Head BSF

In the News: The Central Government announced key appointments in the leadership of two major Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). Shatrujeet Singh Kapoor has been appointed as the Director General of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), while Praveen Kumar will assume charge as the Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF).

Key Points:

- **ITBP Appointment:** Shatrujeet Singh Kapoor, a senior IPS officer, has been appointed as the Director General of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). The appointment was approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) and places Kapoor at the helm of the force responsible for guarding India's border with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- **BSF Appointment:** Praveen Kumar has been designated as the Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF), India's largest border guarding force. Kumar will lead the BSF in its critical role of securing India's international borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, spanning over 6,300 kilometers.
- **About ITBP:** The Indo-Tibetan Border Police is a specialized mountain warfare force established in 1962, primarily tasked with guarding the 3,488-kilometer-long India-China border from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh.
- **About BSF:** The Border Security Force, established in 1965, is India's primary border guarding organization deployed along the international borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh. With over 2.65 lakh personnel, the BSF is responsible for preventing cross-border infiltration, smuggling, and other transnational crimes while maintaining border security.
- **Strategic Challenges:** Both appointments come amid ongoing border tensions with China along the LAC and continuing security concerns along the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders. Kapoor and Kumar will be responsible for managing complex operational challenges including border infrastructure development, modernization of forces, and coordination with intelligence agencies.

Shri Praveen Vashista Appointed Vigilance Commissioner in Central Vigilance Commission

In the News: The President of India appointed Shri Praveen Vashista as Vigilance Commissioner in the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) through a warrant dated December 12, 2025. He assumed charge on January 16, 2026, after taking the oath of office, marking a significant institutional development in India's anti-corruption framework.

Key Points:

- **Appointment Details:** Shri Praveen Vashista was appointed under Section 4(1) of the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003, by the President of India. The appointment followed his voluntary retirement from the Indian Police Service, which was accepted by the competent authority.
- **Oath-Taking Ceremony:** Shri Vashista took oath before the Central Vigilance Commissioner on January 16, 2026, who was authorized by the President under Section 5(3) of the CVC Act, 2003. The swearing-in ceremony was attended by senior officials from the Department of Personnel and Training, Central Bureau of Investigation, Enforcement Directorate, and the Central Vigilance Commission.
- **About Central Vigilance Commission:** The CVC is a statutory body established under the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003. It consists of a CVC and two Vigilance Commissioners. All members are appointed by the President appoints based on a committee recommendation.
- **Role and Responsibilities:** As Vigilance Commissioner, Shri Vashista will supervise vigilance administration across central government organizations, advise authorities on corruption-related matters, and exercise powers in relation to corruption prevention
- **Tenure and Status:** Vigilance Commissioners hold office for a term of four years or until attaining the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.

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operational challenges including border infrastructure development, modernization of forces, and coordination with intelligence agencies.

ECONOMY

India loses 0.4% of its GDP every year to natural disasters

In the News: India faces significant economic losses from natural disasters, with various studies reporting GDP losses ranging from 0.28% to 2% annually. According to Munich Re's latest analysis covering 2020-2025, India loses approximately 0.28% of its Gross National Income (GNI) to weather-related disasters, amounting to an average of $9 billion (approximately ₹75,000 crore) per year.

Key Points:

- **Economic Impact Assessment:** Between 2020 and 2025, India's average annual losses from natural disasters stood at $9 billion (0.28% of GNI), placing it third among the world's ten largest economies in terms of disaster losses relative to national income, after the United States (0.54%) and Germany (0.29%).
- **Historical GDP Loss Data:** Research on flood impacts between 1990 and 2023, India lost about $79.5 billion economically due to natural disasters, according to the 2023 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction by the United Nations.
- **Floods as Primary Economic Burden:** Floods are recorded as the costliest disaster in India, accounting for 68% (or 63% in some estimates) of total economic losses from all natural disasters, followed by cyclones (16%), earthquakes (10%), droughts (4%), heat waves (0.8%), cold waves (0.29%), and landslides (0.11%). Floods alone impact approximately 6% of India's rural population annually, making them the most economically devastating natural calamity facing the nation.
- **Geographic Vulnerability:** India's geographical diversity makes it exceptionally prone to multiple types of natural disasters. According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), approximately 58.6% of India's landmass is vulnerable to earthquakes of varying intensities, 12% of land area is prone to floods and river erosion, and 8% is susceptible to cyclones..
- **Disaster Management Framework:** India has established comprehensive disaster management structures including the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs), and District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) to address disaster preparedness and response. The National Policy on Disaster Management (NPDM) 2009 advocates a holistic approach covering preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation, with emphasis on community participation and capacity building.

RBI Notifies New Foreign Exchange Management (Guarantees) Regulations, 2026

In the News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has notified the Foreign Exchange Management (Guarantees) Regulations, 2026, introducing a comprehensive regulatory framework governing guarantees issued by Indian entities in favor of foreign parties and vice versa.

Key Points:

- **New Regulatory Framework:** The Foreign Exchange Management (Guarantees) Regulations, 2026 replace earlier provisions governing guarantees under FEMA, providing a consolidated and updated framework. The regulations clearly define permissible guarantee transactions, reporting requirements, and compliance procedures for both residents and non-residents.
- **Authorized Dealer Banks' Role:** Authorized Dealer (AD) Category-I banks continue to play a central role in facilitating guarantee transactions. The regulations specify procedures for banks to follow when issuing or confirming guarantees, including due diligence requirements, documentation standards, and reporting obligations to the RBI.
- **Risk Management Provisions:** The regulations emphasize prudent risk management practices, requiring entities to assess counterparty risk, maintain adequate collateral or financial backing, and ensure guarantees are issued only for legitimate underlying transactions.
- **Permitted and Prohibited Transactions:** The regulations clearly delineate permissible guarantee transactions, such as those supporting trade, investment, and legitimate business operations. Prohibited guarantees include those for speculative transactions, unauthorized capital account transactions, or purposes that circumvent existing FEMA provisions.
- **Alignment with Ease of Doing Business:** The new regulations reflect the RBI's ongoing efforts to liberalize foreign exchange management while maintaining macroeconomic stability.

Deloitte Forecasts Robust GDP Growth for India in FY26, Slower Pace in FY27

In the News: Global consulting firm Deloitte has released its economic outlook for India, projecting robust GDP growth for fiscal year 2025-26 (FY26) followed by a moderation in growth rate for FY27. The forecast reflects optimism about India's near-term economic trajectory while acknowledging potential headwinds that could temper expansion in subsequent years, providing insights into India's position as one of the world's fastest-growing major economies.

Key Points:

- **FY26 Growth Projection:** Deloitte forecasts strong GDP growth for India in FY26, driven by sustained domestic consumption, increased capital expenditure, resilient services sector performance, and continued government infrastructure investments.
- **FY27 Growth Moderation:** The consulting firm anticipates a slower growth pace in FY27 compared to FY26, reflecting potential challenges such as base effects from previous high growth, possible global economic slowdown, normalization of post-pandemic consumption patterns, and the impact of tighter monetary conditions on investment and spending.
- **Investment and Capital Formation:** Government capital expenditure on infrastructure projects, production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes attracting manufacturing investments, and corporate capacity expansion are expected to sustain investment activity in FY26. The pace may ease in FY27 depending on global economic conditions and private sector confidence.
- **Global Economic Uncertainties:** Deloitte's forecast acknowledges external risks including global trade tensions, geopolitical conflicts, commodity price volatility, advanced economies' monetary policy trajectories, and potential recession risks in major markets that could affect India's export performance and foreign investment flows.
- **Inflation and Monetary Policy:** The growth trajectory will be influenced by the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy stance, inflation management, and the balance between supporting growth and maintaining price stability. Easing inflationary pressures could provide room for accommodative policies supporting economic expansion.

RBI Recognizes FEDAI as Self-Regulatory Organisation for Forex Dealers

In the News: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officially recognized the Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association of India (FEDAI) as a Self-Regulatory Organisation (SRO) for forex dealers. This recognition empowers FEDAI to oversee and regulate foreign exchange market practices, ensuring compliance, ethical standards, and market discipline.

Key Points:

- **SRO Recognition:** The RBI granted Self-Regulatory Organisation status to FEDAI, marking a significant step in strengthening the governance framework of India's foreign exchange market. This recognition enables FEDAI to formulate and enforce rules, codes of conduct, and best practices for forex dealers operating in India.
- **About FEDAI:** The Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association of India is the primary association of banks dealing in foreign exchange in India, established in 1958.
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** As an SRO, FEDAI will be responsible for framing regulations for member banks, monitoring compliance with forex guidelines, resolving disputes among members, and promoting transparency in foreign exchange transactions.
- **Regulatory Framework:** FEDAI will work in coordination with the RBI to ensure adherence to Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) provisions and other regulatory requirements. The SRO status allows FEDAI to implement self-governance mechanisms, reducing the regulatory burden on the central bank while maintaining market integrity.

Karnataka Bank Bags IBA Award for Best Fintech & DPI Adoption

In the News: Karnataka Bank received the prestigious Indian Banks' Association (IBA) Award for Best Fintech & Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Adoption.

Key Points:

- **Award Recognition:** Karnataka Bank was honored with the IBA Award for Best Fintech & DPI Adoption, recognizing its exemplary implementation of digital technologies and integration with India's Digital Public Infrastructure. The award was presented by the Indian Banks' Association, the apex body representing banks in India.
- **Bank Profile:** Karnataka Bank is a leading private sector bank headquartered in Mangaluru, Karnataka, with a network spanning across India. Established in 1924, the bank has been at the forefront of adopting technology-driven banking solutions to serve its diverse customer base.

- **Digital Public Infrastructure Integration:** The bank has successfully integrated key DPI platforms including Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Account Aggregator framework, and the Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN).
- **Fintech Innovations:** Karnataka Bank has implemented various fintech solutions including AI-powered chatbots for customer service, blockchain-based remittance systems, and advanced data analytics for personalized banking services.
- **Customer Impact:** The bank's digital initiatives have significantly improved customer convenience through features such as 24/7 digital banking services, instant fund transfers, paperless account operations, and enhanced security protocols. The adoption has resulted in increased transaction volumes and improved customer satisfaction scores.

STATIC

Swami Vivekananda's 164th Birth Anniversary: A Tribute to His Vision and Wisdom

In the News: India celebrated the 164th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, one of the nation's most revered spiritual leaders and philosophers. The day is also observed as National Youth Day across the country, honoring Swami Vivekananda's profound influence on India's youth and his timeless teachings on spirituality, education, and social reform.

Key Points:

- **National Youth Day Observance:** January 12 is celebrated as National Youth Day in India since 1984, commemorating Swami Vivekananda's birthday. The day aims to inspire young people with his ideals of courage, strength, and selfless service to humanity.
- **Historic Chicago Address:** Swami Vivekananda gained international recognition with his iconic speech at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1893. His address beginning with "Sisters and Brothers of America" introduced Hindu philosophy and Indian spirituality to the Western world.
- **Philosophical Contributions:** He emphasized the unity of all religions and promoted Vedanta philosophy globally. His teachings focused on the inherent divinity of the soul, self-realization, and the importance of service to humanity as worship to God.
- **Educational Vision:** Swami Vivekananda advocated for a holistic education system that develops both the mind and character. He believed education should build self-confidence and enable individuals to stand on their own feet while serving society.
- **Ramakrishna Mission:** In 1897, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, a philanthropic organization that continues to work in areas of education, healthcare, disaster relief, and rural development across India and internationally.

As Machado presents the Nobel to Trump, can the Peace Prize be transferred?

In the News: Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado presented her 2025 Nobel Peace Prize medal to President Donald Trump during a private meeting at the White House. Machado gave Trump the medal in appreciation for the U.S. military raid on January 3 that deposed Venezuela's leader Nicolás Maduro.

Key Points:

- **Medal Presentation:**.A photo shows Trump holding a large gold-framed plaque containing the medal with a dedication expressing gratitude from the Venezuelan people for Trump's actions to secure a free Venezuela.
- **Cannot Be Transferred:** The Norwegian Nobel Institute stated that while the medal can change hands, the title of Nobel Peace Prize laureate cannot be transferred. Organizers emphasized that once a Nobel Prize is announced, it cannot be revoked, shared, or transferred to others.
- **Machado's Nobel Win:** María Corina Machado won the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize for her work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and her push to move the country from dictatorship to democracy.
- **Trump's Desire for Nobel:** Trump's longstanding desire to win the Nobel Peace Prize is well known. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 2025, Trump claimed he ended seven wars and stated that everyone says he should get the Nobel Peace Prize.
- **Context of U.S. Action:** The medal presentation came after a U.S. military raid on January 3, 2026, that captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. Maduro faces drug trafficking charges in New York, to which he has pleaded not guilty.

IMPORTANT DAYS

Indian Army Day 2026: History, Significance, Parade Highlights, Quotes

In the News: India celebrated its 78th Army Day on January 15, 2026, commemorating the historic occasion when Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa took over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army in 1949.

Key Points:

- **Historical Significance:** Army Day is celebrated annually on January 15 to mark the day in 1949 when Lieutenant General (later Field Marshal) K.M. Cariappa became the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, replacing General Sir Francis Butcher, the last British officer to hold the position. This transition symbolized India's complete military independence following independence in 1947.

- **2026 Parade Location:** The highlight of the day will be the 78th Army Day Parade, being organised in Jaipur for the first time. The parade will be held on Mahal Road, and entry to the venue will be strictly restricted to those who have completed prior registration.

- **Chief Guest and Attendees:** General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of Army Staff, presided over the Army Day celebrations and reviewed the parade.

- **Parade Highlights:** The 2026 parade featured impressive displays including marching contingents from various regiments, mechanized columns showcasing advanced tanks and artillery systems, demonstrations of indigenous weapon systems under the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, helicopter flypasts, and special performances by Army bands. The parade also highlighted women's participation in combat roles.

- **Awards and Gallantry Honors:** Army Day 2026 included the presentation of gallantry awards and Sena Medals to distinguished soldiers for their exceptional bravery and service.

- **Themes:** The 2026 celebrations emphasized themes of modernization, technological advancement, and self-reliance in defense manufacturing.