

Weekly Current Affairs 12th July to 18th July 2026

CONTENTS

NATIONAL.....	2
INTERNATIONAL	10
AWARDS AND HONOURS.....	14
ECONOMY	14
APPOINTMENTS	15
ENVIRONMENT	15
SCIENCE AND TECH.....	16
IMPORTANT DAYS	18
STATIC	18
SPORTS	19

IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Inside SC's proposed regulations for AI use in courts: What's allowed, what's absolutely barred

In the News: The Supreme Court of India has released the draft Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence in Courts, 2026 to govern the use of AI across the judiciary. The draft permits AI for administrative and assistive functions but places strict restrictions on its use in judicial decision-making. Comments and suggestions from stakeholders and the public have been invited until July 15, 2026.

Key Points:

- **Permitted Uses of AI:** Courts may use approved AI systems for case management, transcription, translation, legal research, document summarisation, accessibility services and administrative work. Such systems must operate under the supervision and verification of officers nominated by the court.
- **Human Control over Decisions:** No judicial outcome may be reached solely through an algorithm or on the basis of AI-generated information. AI may provide advisory assistance, but judges must independently examine the facts, law, evidence and reasoning before arriving at a decision.
- **Absolutely Prohibited Uses:** The draft bars AI-based risk scoring for flight risk, recidivism or bail eligibility. It also prohibits AI from determining witness credibility, predicting the conduct of parties or accused persons, and using unexplained black-box systems in matters affecting personal liberty.
- **Disclosure and Transparency:** Litigants must be informed when an AI system has materially assisted a court in case management, document analysis or judicial administration. Courts will also maintain an AI Register containing details of approved systems, audits and operational outcomes.
- **Regulatory Structure:** An Apex Body comprising judges and experts will prescribe mandatory standards for AI use. AI Committees and Secretariats will operate at the Supreme Court and High Court levels, while the proposed CoRE-AI research body will evaluate emerging tools and associated risks.

MEA says 10 Indians rescued, one missing after vessel attacked off Oman

In the News: India condemned an attack on the commercial vessel GFS Galaxy off the coast of Oman on July 12, 2026. Of the 11 Indian nationals aboard the vessel, ten were rescued, while one remained missing. The Indian Embassy in Oman began coordinating with Omani authorities in the continuing search-and-rescue operation.

Key Points:

- **MEA Response:** The Ministry of External Affairs described attacks on commercial vessels and civilian infrastructure as deeply worrying. India called for the protection of civilian shipping and the peaceful resolution of the continuing regional conflict.
- **Search-and-Rescue Operation:** The Indian Embassy in Muscat is monitoring the situation and maintaining contact with Omani authorities. Consular assistance generally includes coordination with local agencies, support for rescued nationals and communication with their families.
- **Incident Location:** Oman lies along the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman, close to the Strait of Hormuz. The strait connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and is one of the world's most important maritime routes for petroleum and liquefied natural gas.
- **Conflicting Account:** Iran stated that it had fired a warning shot at a vessel travelling through what it described as an unapproved route. India's official statement focused on the safety of its nationals and did not independently assign responsibility for the attack.
- **Maritime Law:** Freedom of navigation and the safety of commercial shipping are central principles of international maritime law. Attacks on merchant vessels can disrupt trade, insurance costs, energy supplies and the movement of Indian seafarers employed on foreign-flagged ships.

Parents' SIR Details Required for Enrolment

In the News: The Election Commission of India has made it mandatory for new applicants seeking inclusion in electoral rolls to submit declarations containing their parents' Special Intensive Revision details. The requirement applies to

applications submitted through Form 6. Officials clarified that the declaration was introduced through administrative instructions and that Form 6 itself has not been formally amended.

Key Points:

- **Purpose of the Declaration:** The parents' SIR information will be used to match applicants with records from earlier intensive revisions. The Election Commission maintains that the process will assist in verifying eligibility and reduce the number of separate documents required from new voters.
- **Online Applications:** Applicants using the online voter-registration system will have to complete the SIR declaration before proceeding with Form 6. Form 6 is used by eligible citizens seeking first-time inclusion in the electoral roll of a constituency.
- **Meaning of SIR:** A Special Intensive Revision involves fresh or extensive verification of electoral-roll entries. It differs from routine continuous updation and may include house-to-house verification, matching with older records and examination of eligibility documents.
- **Eligibility for Registration:** Article 326 provides for elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies on the basis of adult suffrage. A person must be an Indian citizen, at least 18 years old on the relevant qualifying date and ordinarily resident in the constituency.
- **Legal Framework:** Electoral rolls are prepared under the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. The Election Commission exercises constitutional supervision over electoral-roll preparation under Article 324 of the Constitution.

Ahmedabad Sets Guinness World Record by Planting 3.61 Lakh Saplings in One Hour

In the News: The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, volunteers and residents of the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha constituency created a Guinness World Record by planting more than 3.61 lakh saplings within one hour. The plantation was carried out using the Miyawaki method and involved over 25,000 volunteers.

Key Points:

- **Record Plantation Drive:** More than 3,61,000 saplings were planted within one hour under the large-scale public plantation campaign. The initiative was undertaken by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation with the participation of voluntary organisations, government departments and local citizens.
- **Miyawaki Method:** The plantation used the Miyawaki technique, which involves planting native species at high density to create compact urban forests. The method was developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki and is particularly suitable for limited urban spaces.
- **Public Participation:** More than 25,000 volunteers took part in the record-setting exercise. The achievement was presented as an example of community-led environmental conservation supported by local administration and voluntary organisations.
- **Wider Plantation Campaign:** More than 1.26 crore saplings were planted across the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha constituency under the Public Plantation Campaign. Of these, over 1.15 crore were planted at 404 public sites, while more than 11 lakh were planted on private premises.
- **Connection with National Initiative:** The plantation programme was associated with the broader 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign. The campaign seeks to promote tree plantation, public responsibility for sapling survival and community participation in environmental protection.

With 4 new benches, how the Supreme Court plans to clear its oldest pending cases

In the News: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant constituted four special Division Benches to hear the Supreme Court's oldest pending civil and criminal cases. The arrangement, effective from July 13, 2026, seeks to provide uninterrupted hearings for decades-old matters and strengthen docket management in the Court.

Key Points:

- **Composition of Civil Benches:** Two Division Benches headed by Justice P.K. Mishra and Justice S.V.N. Bhatti will hear the oldest pending civil cases. Each bench consists of two judges and has been freed from routine miscellaneous hearings on the specified working days.

- **Composition of Criminal Benches:** Two other Division Benches, headed by Justice Manoj Misra and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, will exclusively deal with the oldest criminal matters. The separation of civil and criminal cases is intended to ensure focused and continuous hearings.
- **Working Schedule:** The special benches will function on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, which are treated as non-miscellaneous days in the Supreme Court. Mondays and Fridays are generally reserved for fresh filings, admission matters and preliminary hearings.
- **Scale of Pendency:** National Judicial Data Grid figures cited in the report showed 96,045 cases pending before the Supreme Court. These included 74,244 civil matters and 21,801 criminal matters, making civil disputes the larger component of the backlog.
- **Oldest Pending Matters:** Twenty-four civil cases and two criminal cases had remained pending for more than 30 years. The oldest civil case dated back to 1986, while the oldest pending criminal case was registered in 1991.

What is PMFME Scheme?

In the News: The Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme was launched on June 29, 2020 under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, not a Central Sector scheme, administered by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries. The scheme was operational from 2020-21 to 2025-26 with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore.

Key Points:

- **Purpose of the Scheme:** PMFME was designed to improve the competitiveness of existing micro-enterprises in the unorganised food-processing sector and assist their transition into the formal economy. It provides financial, technical, training and business-development support.
- **One District One Product Approach:** The scheme follows the One District One Product approach for selecting and developing locally important food products. This enables common procurement, processing, storage, branding, marketing and value-chain development within identified districts.
- **Assistance to Individual Enterprises:** Eligible individual micro food-processing units can receive a credit-linked capital subsidy equal to 35 per cent of the eligible project cost, subject to a maximum of ₹10 lakh. The beneficiary must contribute at least 10 per cent, while the remaining amount is financed through a bank loan.
- **Support for Groups:** Farmer Producer Organisations, producer cooperatives and Self-Help Groups can receive assistance for processing, storage, packaging, testing, marketing and common infrastructure. Eligible SHG members may receive seed capital of ₹40,000 each for working capital and small tools.
- **Funding Pattern and Coverage:** The standard Centre-State funding ratio is 60:40, while it is 90:10 for Northeastern and Himalayan states. Union Territories without legislatures receive complete Central funding, and the original target was to assist two lakh micro food-processing units.

India Joins NeoSep1 Trial to Combat Neonatal Sepsis

In the News: JIPMER, Puducherry, became the first centre in India to enrol a newborn in the NeoSep1 international clinical trial. The trial is examining safe, effective and affordable antibiotic combinations for neonatal sepsis, particularly infections caused by antimicrobial-resistant organisms.

Key Points:

- **Participating Institution:** The Indian centre is the Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research in Puducherry. Dr Nishad Plakkal, Head of JIPMER's Department of Neonatology, is the principal investigator and represents Asia-Pacific sites on the trial's steering committee.
- **Coordinating Organisation:** NeoSep1 is coordinated by the Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership, a not-for-profit organisation working on treatments for drug-resistant infections. The study has expanded across participating hospitals in Asia and Africa.
- **Scale of the Trial:** Nearly 3,000 newborns are expected to be enrolled over three years. The trial seeks to identify antibiotic combinations that are not only clinically effective but also affordable and suitable for hospitals in low- and middle-income countries.
- **Antimicrobial Resistance Challenge:** Multidrug-resistant organisms such as *Klebsiella* and *Acinetobacter* are increasingly found in neonatal intensive care units. Resistance has reduced the effectiveness of ampicillin and gentamicin, the first-line antibiotic combination recommended by the World Health Organization.

- **PRACTical Trial Design:** NeoSep1 uses a Personalised Randomised Controlled Trial design. Doctors first identify antibiotic regimens suitable for an individual newborn, after which randomisation is conducted among the appropriate options, allowing the study to reflect real clinical conditions.

Ladakh to Get Autonomous Hill Councils in All Seven Districts: What Article 371 Means

In the News: The Ladakh administration has announced that an Autonomous Hill Development Council will be constituted in each of the Union Territory's seven districts. A separate Union Territory-level elected institution has also been proposed under a customised Article 371 framework, with legislative, executive, financial and administrative powers.

Key Points:

- **Hill Councils in Every District:** Ladakh presently has elected hill councils in Leh and Kargil. The proposed expansion will extend the same local governance structure to Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass, subject to necessary amendments and delimitation of council constituencies.
- **Creation of Five New Districts:** On April 27, 2026, the Ladakh administration notified Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass as new districts, increasing the total number from two to seven. Nubra, Sham and Changthang were carved out of Leh, while Zaskar and Drass were separated from Kargil.
- **Powers of the Councils:** Each council is expected to exercise powers under the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act. These include authority over district development planning, land allotment, local taxation, district-cadre employment and sectors such as education, health, tourism and social welfare.
- **Meaning of Article 371:** Article 371 and Articles 371A to 371J are contained in Part XXI of the Constitution and provide special arrangements for particular States or regions. These provisions address matters such as customary law, land rights, local representation, administrative responsibility and balanced regional development.
- **Proposed Two-Tier Structure:** The customised Article 371 institution would function above the seven district councils and could receive wider Union Territory-level powers. Its precise composition and division of responsibilities have not yet been finalised and will be determined through consultations between Ladakh representatives and the Union Government.

MeitY Releases Digital Threat Report 2025–26 to Strengthen Cybersecurity in India's BFSI Sector

In the News: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology released the second edition of the Digital Threat Report 2025–26 on July 13, 2026. It was prepared with CERT-In, CSIRT-Fin and cybersecurity firm SISA to assess threats affecting banking, financial services, insurance and digital payment systems.

Key Points:

- **Focus of the Report:** The report examines cyber risks affecting banks, insurers, financial-market institutions and payment service providers. It draws upon digital forensics, incident-response research, observations recorded by CERT-In and CSIRT-Fin, and studies concerning the misuse of artificial intelligence.
- **Rapid Conversion of Risks into Attacks:** Six of the seven predictions made in the previous edition have already materialised on a large scale. The period between the discovery of a new technological capability and its exploitation by attackers has declined from years to months or weeks.
- **Established Attack Methods:** Social engineering, credential theft, supply-chain compromise and cloud exploitation are no longer considered occasional or emerging threats. Fraudulent transactions may appear as approved payments, legitimate sessions or ordinary customer behaviour, making early detection more difficult.
- **AI Asymmetry:** The report describes AI asymmetry as a major risk because small, low-resource groups can now conduct sophisticated attacks at machine speed. Offensive cyber capabilities are consequently developing faster than many institutional controls, regulatory responses and conventional defensive systems.
- **Security Framework and Roadmap:** The report introduces the four-layer "Anatomy of Cyber Failure" framework to examine how several weaknesses combine during a breach. It also provides an 18-month roadmap covering foundational controls, continuous risk assessment, coordinated response, information sharing and resilient security architecture.

Gujarat's Unjha Cumin and Fennel Receive GI Tag

In the News: Unjha Cumin, commonly known as Unjha Jeera, and Unjha Fennel have received Geographical Indication tags from India's GI Registry. The recognition formally connects the distinctive reputation and quality of the two agricultural products with the Unjha region of North Gujarat.

Key Points:

- **Products Recognised:** Unjha is one of India's major centres for the cultivation and trade of cumin and fennel. The GI recognition gives the two products separate protected identities and distinguishes authentic Unjha produce from similar spices cultivated or marketed elsewhere.
- **Meaning of a GI:** A geographical indication identifies agricultural, natural or manufactured goods originating from a defined territory. The quality, reputation or other important characteristic of the product must be essentially connected with its geographical origin.
- **Legal Framework:** GI registration in India is governed by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. The Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks administers the system, while the Geographical Indications Registry is located in Chennai.
- **Gujarat's Agricultural GIs:** Gujarat already has several recognised agricultural products, including Gir Kesar Mango, Bhalia Wheat and Kachchhi Kharek. A GI registration remains valid for ten years and may subsequently be renewed in accordance with the prescribed procedure.

Centre Renames Central Vista as Kartavya Bhawan Areas

In the News: Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal announced that the Central Vista redevelopment precinct should henceforth be referred to as the "Kartavya Bhawan Area" or "Kartavya Bhawan Complex". He stated that the revised nomenclature should be used in official documents and government references.

Key Points:

- **Scope of the New Name:** The Kartavya Bhawan Area will cover the existing Kartavya Bhawans and future Union government buildings constructed within the redevelopment precinct. The announcement seeks to provide a common identity to the redeveloped central administrative zone.
- **Common Central Secretariat:** Ten office buildings are planned under the Common Central Secretariat project to accommodate different Union ministries and departments. Three buildings had been completed when the new nomenclature was announced in July 2026.
- **Administrative Purpose:** The Common Central Secretariat is intended to bring ministries operating from scattered and ageing buildings into modern, integrated office complexes. The reorganisation is designed to improve coordination, administrative efficiency and access to shared government facilities.
- **Earlier Renaming of Rajpath:** Rajpath, the ceremonial avenue extending from Rashtrapati Bhavan towards India Gate, was renamed Kartavya Path in September 2022. The word "Kartavya" means duty and was adopted to emphasise responsibility and public service.
- **Seva Teerth Complex:** The new complex containing the Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Secretariat and office of the National Security Adviser has been named Seva Teerth. Kartavya Bhawan-1 and Kartavya Bhawan-2 were formally inaugurated along with the complex in February 2026.

India-UK Free Trade Agreement Takes Effect, Trade Target Set at \$100 Billion

In the News: The India-United Kingdom Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement came into force on 15 July 2026. It reduces or eliminates tariffs on thousands of goods and expands access in services, professional mobility and government procurement. The agreement is intended to help bilateral trade reach \$100 billion by 2030.

Key Points:

- **Duty-Free Access for Indian Goods:** The agreement provides zero-duty access to nearly 99% of India's exports to the United Kingdom, covering almost the entire value of Indian exports. Textiles, leather, footwear, marine products, gems and jewellery, engineering goods and processed foods are among the major beneficiaries.

- **Tariff Commitments:** The United Kingdom immediately removed duties on 96.8% of its tariff lines, covering 97.7% of bilateral trade value. India immediately eliminated duties on 64.1% of tariff lines and will phase out duties on another 21%, while continuing protection for sensitive products.
- **Services and Professional Mobility:** The services package covers 137 sub-sectors, including information technology, telecommunications, finance, education and professional services. It also facilitates temporary entry for business visitors, investors, intra-company transferees and independent professionals.
- **Social Security Arrangement:** A linked Double Contribution Convention exempts eligible Indian employees and their employers from making social security contributions in both countries for assignments of up to five years. The provision is expected to benefit approximately 75,000 workers and 900 employers.
- **Market Access for the United Kingdom:** British businesses will receive phased access to India's automobile, alcoholic beverage, silver, financial services and government procurement markets. Preferential automobile tariffs will operate through a quota system, while India has retained safeguards for selected sensitive sectors.

India-Australia Civil Nuclear Cooperation

In the News: India and Australia finalised an Administrative Arrangement under their Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement during the Third India-Australia Annual Summit held in Melbourne on 9 July 2026. The arrangement will permit long-term Australian uranium exports to India exclusively for peaceful purposes and under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Key Points:

- **Background of the Agreement:** India and Australia signed the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in September 2014, and it entered into force in November 2015. The Administrative Arrangement finalised in 2026 establishes the procedures required to operationalise the agreement and facilitate regular uranium supplies.
- **Peaceful Use and Safeguards:** Uranium supplied by Australia can be used only in India's civilian nuclear facilities. The nuclear material will remain under safeguards administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which verifies that protected nuclear material is not diverted for military purposes.
- **Nuclear Suppliers Group:** Australia reiterated its support for India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The NSG is a voluntary association of 48 nuclear-supplier countries that coordinates guidelines for exports of nuclear materials, equipment and technology to prevent nuclear proliferation.
- **Importance for India's Energy Programme:** Australia possesses more than one-third of the world's identified uranium resources. A stable Australian supply can diversify India's nuclear-fuel imports and support the Nuclear Energy Mission, which seeks to raise India's nuclear power capacity to 100 GW by 2047.
- **India's Nuclear Power Capacity:** India currently operates 24 nuclear reactors at seven sites, with an installed capacity of approximately 8.78 GW. Natural uranium is mainly used in India's Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors, while the three-stage nuclear programme ultimately seeks to utilise the country's abundant thorium reserves.

US Russia sanctions bill: The proposed 100% tariff and what it could mean for India

In the News: United States senators unveiled a revised Russia sanctions bill on 14 July 2026 that proposes tariffs of up to 100% on goods from the largest purchasers of Russian oil and natural gas. India is included among the five largest buyers of Russian crude and could be affected if the proposal is enacted and implemented.

Key Pointers:

- **Revised Tariff Provision:** The revised legislation reduces the proposed maximum tariff from the earlier blanket rate of 500% to 100%. The tariff provision is now primarily aimed at the five largest purchasers of Russian energy rather than every country maintaining energy trade with Russia.
- **Countries Covered:** According to the bill's supporters, the five leading purchasers of Russian crude are China, India, Slovakia, Hungary and Azerbaijan. The legislation seeks to reduce Russia's energy revenues, which the United States argues contribute to financing its war against Ukraine.
- **Other Sanctions Proposed:** The bill also targets Russia's shadow tanker fleet, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation and major energy projects such as Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG. Shadow-fleet vessels are used to transport Russian oil while avoiding Western shipping, insurance and financial restrictions.

- **Possible Effect on Indian Exports:** The United States imported goods worth approximately \$103.8 billion from India in 2025. A 100% tariff, if imposed, could make several Indian products considerably more expensive in the American market and affect exporters in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, electronics, textiles and jewellery.
- **Bill Not Yet in Force:** The tariff is a legislative proposal and is not an automatically applicable duty at present. The revised bill permits the US President to waive sanctions in the national interest, while its final operation would depend on congressional approval, presidential action and subsequent implementation rules.

Dr. Srinivasa Kumar Tummala Appointed Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences

In the News: The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved the appointment of oceanographer Dr. Srinivasa Kumar Tummala as Secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences. The appointment was announced on July 16, 2026.

Key Pointers:

- Dr. Tummala has been appointed for two years from the date on which he assumes charge, or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
- Before this appointment, he headed the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System Secretariat under UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission in Perth, Australia.
- He has more than three decades of experience in remote sensing, satellite oceanography, coastal-hazard mitigation and disaster management.
- He previously served as Director of the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, from August 2020.
- Following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, he served as Project Manager for establishing the Indian Tsunami Early Warning System at INCOIS.
- His new responsibilities assume importance in the context of the Deep Ocean Mission, climate modelling, maritime-disaster warning systems, oceanography and the Blue Economy.
- He received the Indian National Geospatial Award in 2008 and the National Geoscience Award in 2010 for his work in geospatial applications and tsunami-warning infrastructure.

Cabinet Approves Semicon 2.0

In the News: On July 15, 2026, the Union Cabinet approved Semicon 2.0 with a total budgetary outlay of ₹1,27,500 crore to strengthen India's semiconductor-design and manufacturing ecosystem.

Key Pointers:

- Semicon 2.0 builds on the first phase of the India Semiconductor Mission and provides long-term policy support for the domestic semiconductor industry.
- The programme is organised around six pillars: chip design; machines and materials; additional fabrication plants; ATMP/OSAT units; research and development; and talent development.
- It will incentivise the domestic production and research of semiconductor-manufacturing equipment, materials, specialised chemicals and gases.
- India's first semiconductor fabrication plant under the existing programme is scheduled to be commissioned in 2028, while Semicon 2.0 will support silicon, compound-semiconductor, discrete-component and display fabs.
- The programme will support research into technologies more advanced than the 28-nanometre to 110-nanometre nodes with which India's semiconductor-manufacturing journey began.
- Around 105 start-ups and MSMEs have received access to Electronic Design Automation tools, while approximately 68,000 students across 315 universities have already received chip-design training.
- Under Semicon 1.0, 12 manufacturing units involving cumulative investment exceeding ₹1.64 lakh crore were approved; Micron, Kaynes and CG Semi had begun commercial production by July 2026.

UDISE+ and Performance Grading Index 2.0, 2025-26

In the News: The Union Ministry of Education released the UDISE+ Report 2025-26 and the Performance Grading Index 2.0 for States, Union Territories and districts on July 7, 2026.

Key Pointers:

UDISE+, or the Unified District Information System for Education Plus, is the national education-management information system maintained by the Department of School Education and Literacy.

The number of schoolteachers increased to 1.02 crore, an 8.3% rise from 94 lakh in 2022–23; women constituted 54.9% of the teaching workforce.

The pupil-teacher ratio stood at 10:1 at the foundational stage, 12:1 at the preparatory stage, 17:1 at the middle stage and 21:1 at the secondary stage.

The secondary-school dropout rate declined from 8.2% in 2024–25 to 7% in 2025–26, while the secondary-level Gross Enrolment Ratio increased from 68.5% to 71.7%.

Schools with computers increased to 69.9%, while schools with internet connectivity increased to 67.4%. Safe drinking water was available in 99.5% of schools.

PGI 2.0 assesses States and Union Territories on 70 indicators carrying 1,000 points, distributed across six domains: learning outcomes, access, infrastructure, equity, governance and teacher education and training.

Chandigarh scored 766 out of 1,000 and became the only State or Union Territory placed in the Uttam-3 grade. No State or Union Territory attained Utkarsh, Uttam-1 or Uttam-2.

Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu top NITI Aayog's Investment Friendliness Index

In the News: NITI Aayog released the Investment Friendliness Index 2026 on July 17, 2026. Gujarat secured the highest overall score, followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The index evaluates the ability of States and Union Territories to attract, facilitate and sustain investment.

Key Points:

- **Leading States:** Gujarat ranked first with a score of 56.6 out of 100, Maharashtra stood second with 53.7, and Tamil Nadu ranked third with 53.3. Goa and Odisha completed the list of five top-performing States.
- **Coverage of the Index:** The index assesses all 28 States and eight Union Territories. It provides a common framework for comparing investment conditions and identifying areas requiring policy, regulatory or infrastructure improvements.
- **Eight Assessment Pillars:** The index covers infrastructure, business climate, resources, government policy, regulatory ease, institutional environment, financial health and environmental resilience. These pillars examine both economic capacity and the quality of administration.
- **Reasons for High Rankings:** Gujarat performed strongly in port operations, electricity supply and financial health. Maharashtra benefited from private equity and venture capital investment, while Tamil Nadu scored well in infrastructure, exports and conversion of investment agreements into projects.
- **Purpose of the Index:** NITI Aayog has described the exercise as a diagnostic and benchmarking tool rather than merely a competitive ranking. States are classified as top performers, frontrunners, emerging performers and aspiring States according to their overall investment ecosystem.

Gujarat Tops NITI Aayog's First Investment Friendliness Index for States

In the News: NITI Aayog released the first Investment Friendliness Index 2026, assessing the investment environment across all 28 states and eight Union Territories. Gujarat secured the first position with a score of 56.6, followed by Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. The index compares states on factors affecting the establishment, operation and expansion of businesses.

Key Points:

- **Leading States:** Gujarat topped the overall ranking with 56.6 points, while Maharashtra secured the second position with 53.7 points. Tamil Nadu ranked third with 53.3 points, followed by Goa with 53.1 points and Odisha with 52.4 points.
- **Assessment Framework:** The index evaluates states through 84 indicators organised under eight pillars. These are infrastructure, business climate, resources, government policy, regulatory ease, financial health, institutional environment and environmental resilience.
- **Data and Scoring:** The index uses a 100-point scale and combines 62 secondary-data indicators with 22 perception-based indicators. Feedback from investors and publicly available economic and administrative data were used to assess state-level conditions.

- **Performance Categories:** States and Union Territories were classified as top performers, frontrunners, emerging performers and aspiring states. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Goa and Odisha were placed in the top-performer category with scores above 50.
- **Purpose of the Index:** The index is intended to identify strengths and weaknesses in state investment ecosystems and encourage competition among states. It covers policy predictability, infrastructure, access to resources, regulatory processes and the broader conditions required for sustained private investment.

RBI Financial Stability Report 2026: Top Takeaways You Should Know

In the News: The Reserve Bank of India released the June 2026 edition of its Financial Stability Report on 30 June 2026. The report described India's financial system as resilient and well-capitalised, supported by improving bank asset quality and strong capital buffers. It also highlighted risks arising from geopolitical tensions, energy prices, funding pressures and technology-related threats.

Key Points:

- **About the Report:** The Financial Stability Report is released half-yearly and presents the collective assessment of the Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council. It examines systemic risks and the resilience of banks, NBFCs, insurance companies and other financial institutions.
- **Improvement in Asset Quality:** The gross non-performing asset ratio of scheduled commercial banks declined to a multi-decadal low of 1.8 per cent in March 2026. Agriculture continued to record the highest sectoral GNPA ratio at 5.1 per cent and accounted for 37.2 per cent of total bank GNPA.
- **Capital and Profitability:** The capital-to-risk-weighted-assets ratio of scheduled commercial banks stood at 17.7 per cent, while the Common Equity Tier-1 ratio reached 15.3 per cent. Bank profit after tax increased to ₹4,05,268 crore during 2025-26.
- **Stress-Test Results:** Under the baseline scenario, the banking system's GNPA ratio may rise marginally to 1.9 per cent by March 2028.
- **Risks Identified:** The report warned that high oil prices, supply-chain disruptions, global public debt, stretched asset valuations and leveraged non-bank institutions could affect financial stability. It also noted that 8 NBFCs could fall below prescribed capital levels under a severe credit-stress scenario.

INTERNATIONAL

South China Sea Arbitral Award Marks 10 Years

In the News: July 12, 2026 marked ten years since the arbitral award in the South China Sea dispute between the Philippines and China. Fourteen countries issued a joint statement reaffirming that China's expansive maritime claims lacked a legal basis under international law. China continued to reject the award as illegal and non-binding.

Key Points:

- **Origin of the Case:** The Philippines initiated arbitration against China in 2013 under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The tribunal delivered its award on July 12, 2016, with the Permanent Court of Arbitration serving as the registry.
- **Nine-Dash Line:** The tribunal held that China's claim to historic rights within the so-called nine-dash line had no legal basis under UNCLOS. It also ruled that none of the disputed Spratly Islands features could generate a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone.
- **Scope of the Award:** The tribunal examined maritime entitlements, fishing rights, environmental damage and interference with Philippine activities. It did not decide which country possessed sovereignty over the disputed islands and maritime features.
- **Binding Nature:** The award is final and legally binding on China and the Philippines under UNCLOS, although the tribunal has no independent mechanism to enforce its conclusions. China refused to participate in the proceedings and continues to reject the ruling.

US, UK and 12 Nations Reject China's South China Sea Claims, Reaffirm 2016 Hague Ruling

In the News: Fourteen countries issued a joint statement marking the tenth anniversary of the 2016 South China Sea arbitral award. They reaffirmed that China's expansive maritime claims, including those based on historical rights, have

no legal basis under international law. The European Union released a separate statement supporting the ruling and peaceful settlement of maritime disputes.

Key Points:

- **Countries Supporting the Statement:** The joint statement was issued by the United States, United Kingdom, Philippines, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Germany, Italy, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia. The countries opposed unilateral or coercive actions that could threaten peace and stability in the South China Sea.
- **2016 Arbitral Award:** The award was delivered on July 12, 2016, in the case brought by the Philippines against China. The tribunal concluded that China had no legal basis to claim historical rights over resources within areas enclosed by its nine-dash line beyond the maritime zones permitted under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- **Legal Framework:** The case was decided by an arbitral tribunal constituted under Annex VII of UNCLOS, with the Permanent Court of Arbitration serving as the registry. The award is considered final and legally binding on China and the Philippines, although the tribunal did not decide questions of territorial sovereignty over land features.
- **Navigation and Maritime Security:** The joint statement stressed the importance of freedom of navigation, freedom of overflight and other lawful uses of the sea. It also opposed the use of coast guard vessels, military forces and maritime militia to obstruct or intimidate the lawful maritime activities of other countries.
- **China's Response:** China rejected the renewed international support for the award and described the ruling as illegal, null and void. Beijing maintains that it neither accepts nor recognises the tribunal's decision and continues to claim sovereignty and maritime rights over large parts of the South China Sea.

UN's First Scientific Report on AI Warns Governments to Act Before It's Too Late

In the News: The United Nations' Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence released its preliminary scientific report on AI opportunities, risks and impacts in July 2026. The assessment warns that existing safeguards are not developing as quickly as AI capabilities and that delayed action may leave governments unable to address emerging risks effectively.

Key Points:

- **First Global Scientific AI Body:** The panel is described by the UN as the first global scientific body devoted entirely to artificial intelligence. It consists of 40 independent experts drawn from all five UN geographical regions and works as an evidence and early-warning mechanism.
- **Constitution of the Panel:** The body was established through UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/325, adopted on August 26, 2025. Its creation followed the Global Digital Compact, adopted in 2024 as part of the wider Pact for the Future.
- **Leadership and Membership:** Yoshua Bengio of Canada and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa of the Philippines serve as the panel's first co-chairs. The 40 members were selected from more than 2,600 applications received from over 140 countries.
- **Seven Areas Examined:** The report examines AI development, applications in health and education, economic effects, security and environmental risks, human rights, democracy, child safety, governance and system reliability. It highlights the difficulty of waiting for conclusive scientific evidence when AI systems are changing rapidly.
- **Role in Global Governance:** The panel is not a regulatory or enforcement organisation and cannot impose binding rules. Its annual scientific assessments will be presented to the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance, with the next annual report expected to inform the May 2027 dialogue in New York.

India Notifies TRQ Allocation Procedure Under India-Oman CEPA

In the News: India has notified the procedure for allocating Tariff Rate Quotas under the India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. DGFT Public Notice No. 20/2026-27, issued on 13 July 2026, amends the Handbook of Procedures, 2023. The trade agreement came into force on 1 June 2026.

Key Points:

- **Meaning of Tariff Rate Quota:** A TRQ permits a specified quantity of a product to be imported at a reduced or zero customs duty. Imports exceeding the authorised quota generally attract the normal Most-Favoured-Nation tariff applicable to that product.

- **Products Covered:** The notified concessions cover dates, marble, ethylene glycol, polymers, PVC, PET, polyurethanes, copper products and aluminium products. Import duty on dates will be eliminated for up to 2,000 tonnes annually, against the normal duty of 30%.
- **Marble and Petrochemical Concessions:** The duty on specified marble and travertine blocks will be reduced from 40% to 25%, subject to a minimum import price of USD 150 per metric tonne and an annual quota of one lakh tonnes. Ethylene glycol will receive a 50% tariff reduction phased over five years within a quota of 150 kilo tonnes.
- **Application Process:** Importers must submit applications online through the DGFT Import Management System under the Tariff Rate Quota section. From 2027-28 onwards, applications must be filed by 28 February of the preceding financial year. A separate application window will be announced for 2026-27.
- **Import and Verification Requirements:** Importers must present a Certificate of Origin issued by the competent authority in Oman at the time of customs clearance. TRQ authorisations will be issued electronically, transmitted to the Indian Customs Electronic Data Interchange System and remain valid for up to 12 months or until the end of the financial year.

Nine European Countries and Ukraine Form Missile Defence Coalition

In the News: Ukraine and nine European countries announced an anti-ballistic missile coalition in Paris on 13 July 2026. The coalition seeks to establish a shared missile-defence capability for Europe by combining European resources with Ukraine's experience in countering Russian missile attacks.

Key Points:

- **Participating Countries:** The coalition includes Ukraine, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The declaration was issued during a meeting involving Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders in Paris.
- **Purpose of the Coalition:** The initiative aims to create an integrated European missile-defence architecture capable of detecting, intercepting and neutralising ballistic missile threats. The participating countries have described the programme as defensive in character.
- **Ukraine's Operational Experience:** Ukraine's experience in intercepting Russian missiles, drones and other aerial threats will contribute to the coalition's research and development efforts. The countries recognised that ballistic missiles are generally more difficult to intercept than cruise missiles or unmanned aerial vehicles.
- **Proposed Defence System:** President Zelenskyy stated that the partners could jointly develop a low-cost, mass-produced anti-ballistic missile system within 12 months. The programme is expected to involve governments, national security advisers, defence manufacturers and research institutions.
- **Membership and Implementation:** No binding deadline has been announced for establishing the complete defence architecture. The coalition will remain open to additional countries willing to contribute technology, research, industrial capacity or financial resources.

Trump backtracks on 20% Hormuz fee plan: Why it was unworkable in the first place

In the News: U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew his proposal to charge a 20% fee on cargo passing through the Strait of Hormuz. On 14 July 2026, he announced that the proposed reimbursement fee would be replaced by trade and investment agreements with Gulf countries.

Key Points:

- **Original Proposal:** The proposed fee was intended to reimburse the United States for protecting commercial vessels moving through the Strait of Hormuz. However, the plan did not clarify whether the 20% would be calculated on cargo value, military expenditure, transportation costs or another financial measure.
- **Legal Objections:** The International Maritime Organization opposed the plan and stated that mandatory tolls cannot ordinarily be imposed merely for passing through an international strait. The transit-passage principles associated with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea favour continuous and unobstructed navigation through such waterways.
- **Practical Difficulties:** The proposal did not identify the authority responsible for assessing cargo value, collecting the fee or dealing with vessels that refused to pay. Questions also remained over whether U.S. forces could guarantee protection against missiles, mines, drones and attacks throughout the waterway.

- **Importance of the Strait:** The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints, carrying around one-fourth of global seaborne oil trade along with major volumes of LNG and fertilisers. Additional charges could increase freight rates, insurance premiums, energy prices and inflation across importing economies.
- **Impact on India:** Around 40% of India's crude oil imports, 60% of its LNG imports and 90% of its LPG imports from West Asia pass through the strait. At an oil price of USD 75 per barrel, a 20% cargo-based fee could have added approximately USD 15 per barrel before freight and insurance costs.

Indus Waters Treaty: Why India wants to renegotiate the pact with Pakistan

In the News: India has renewed its demand for modification or renegotiation of the Indus Waters Treaty, arguing that the 1960 agreement does not adequately address present-day climatic, technological and security conditions. India has separately kept the treaty in abeyance following the April 22, 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack.

Key Points:

- **Origin of the Treaty:** The treaty was signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960, by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan President Ayub Khan after nine years of negotiations. The World Bank facilitated the negotiations and is also a signatory.
- **Division of Rivers:** Ravi, Beas and Sutlej, known as the Eastern Rivers, were allocated primarily to India. Indus, Jhelum and Chenab, called the Western Rivers, were allocated primarily to Pakistan, while India retained limited rights for irrigation, domestic use and hydroelectric generation.
- **India's Modification Notices:** India issued its first formal notice on January 25, 2023, followed by another notice on August 30, 2024. The notices sought government-level discussions under Article XII, which permits treaty provisions to be modified through a duly ratified agreement.
- **Changed Circumstances:** India has cited population growth, climate change, changing river flows, modern hydropower technology and increased water requirements. The treaty also lacks detailed provisions concerning groundwater, water quality, environmental flows and integrated basin management.
- **Dispute-Resolution Structure:** Questions are first examined by the Permanent Indus Commission, differences may be referred to a Neutral Expert, and disputes can reach a Court of Arbitration. India has objected to parallel Neutral Expert and arbitration proceedings concerning the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects.

Andy Burnham Confirmed as UK Labour Leader, Set to Become Prime Minister

In the News: Andy Burnham was confirmed as leader of Britain's governing Labour Party on 17 July 2026, replacing Keir Starmer. He is scheduled to formally become Prime Minister after Starmer submits his resignation to King Charles III and Burnham is invited to form a government. The transfer of office is due to take place on 20 July 2026.

Key Points:

- **Labour Leadership:** Burnham was officially declared Labour leader at a special party conference held at the Trades Union Congress in London. He received the support of 379 Labour MPs and 23 affiliated organisations and faced no rival in the final leadership process.
- **Return to Parliament:** Burnham returned to the House of Commons after winning the Makerfield by-election on 18 June 2026. He secured a majority of 9,231 votes, enabling him to contest the leadership of the parliamentary Labour Party.
- **Political Background:** Burnham served as Mayor of Greater Manchester from 2017 and became widely known as the "King of the North". He previously held senior positions including Health Secretary, Culture Secretary and Chief Secretary to the Treasury under earlier Labour governments.
- **Constitutional Transition:** In the United Kingdom, the monarch formally appoints the person capable of commanding the confidence of the House of Commons as Prime Minister. Burnham will assume office after Starmer's resignation is accepted and King Charles III invites him to form the government.
- **Stated Priorities:** Burnham has identified the cost-of-living crisis, weak public services, regional inequality and the concentration of power in Westminster as major concerns. He has promised greater devolution of authority and a government focused on improving living standards across different regions of the United Kingdom.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

Tamil Poet and Lyricist R. Vairamuthu Conferred with 60th Jnanpith Award

In the News: Tamil poet, novelist and film lyricist R. Vairamuthu received the 60th Jnanpith Award for the year 2025 at a ceremony in New Delhi on 13 July 2026. The award was presented by former Union Minister and scholar Karan Singh, and the ceremony coincided with Vairamuthu's 73rd birthday.

Key Points:

- **About the Jnanpith Award:** The Jnanpith Award is regarded as India's highest literary honour and is presented by Bharatiya Jnanpith for outstanding contribution to literature. It was instituted in 1961 and was presented for the first time in 1965.
- **First Recipient:** Malayalam poet G. Sankara Kurup was the first recipient of the Jnanpith Award. He received it in 1965 for his Malayalam poetry collection *Odakkuzhal*, which is commonly translated into English as *The Bamboo Flute*.
- **Third Tamil Recipient:** Vairamuthu became the third Tamil literary figure to receive the honour. The earlier Tamil recipients were novelist Akilan, who received it in 1975, and writer Jayakanthan, who was honoured in 2002.
- **Literary Contributions:** Vairamuthu's notable works include *Kallikkattu Ithikasam*, *Karuvachi Kaaviyam*, *Thanneer Desam* and *Moondram Ulaga Por*. *Kallikkattu Ithikasam*, which portrays displacement caused by a dam project, received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2003.
- **Award Components and Other Honours:** The Jnanpith Award carries ₹11 lakh, a citation and a bronze replica of Vagdevi, the goddess of knowledge. Vairamuthu has also received seven National Film Awards for Best Lyrics, the Padma Shri in 2003 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014.

72nd National Film Awards 2026: Who Won Best Actor, Best Actress And Best Film?

In the News: The winners of the 72nd National Film Awards were announced on July 18, 2026, at the National Media Centre in New Delhi. The awards recognised films certified by the Central Board of Film Certification between January 1 and December 31, 2024.

Key Points:

- **Best Feature Film:** *Article 370*, directed by Aditya Suhas Jambhale, won the Best Feature Film award. The film's producers, Jio Studios and B62 Studios, and its director received the Swarna Kamal and the prescribed cash prize.
- **Best Actor:** Mammooty and Kartik Aaryan jointly received the Best Actor in a Leading Role award. Mammooty was recognised for the Malayalam film *Bramayugam*, while Kartik Aaryan was honoured for the Hindi film *Chandu Champion*.
- **Best Actress:** Yami Gautam won the Best Actress in a Leading Role award for her performance in *Article 370*. The award carried the Rajat Kamal and a cash prize of ₹2 lakh.
- **Direction Awards:** Rajkumar Periasamy won Best Direction for the Tamil film *Amaran*. Randeep Hooda received the Best Debut Film of a Director award for *Swatantrya Veer Savarkar*.
- **Other Major Honours:** *Kalki 2898 AD* won the award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment. *Bhangaar* was selected as the Best Non-Feature Film, while *Ram-Nami* received the Best Documentary award.

ECONOMY

Government Raises Windfall Tax on Diesel and ATF Exports

In the News: The Central Government revised the export levies on petroleum products with effect from July 16, 2026, raising the duties on diesel and aviation turbine fuel while reducing the duty on petrol exports.

Key Pointers:

- The export duty on diesel was increased from ₹8.50 per litre to ₹15.50 per litre.
- The duty on aviation turbine fuel, commonly called ATF or jet fuel, was increased from ₹7.50 per litre to ₹14.50 per litre.
- In contrast, the export levy on petrol was reduced from ₹4 per litre to ₹2.50 per litre.
- The levy is imposed in the form of a Special Additional Excise Duty, commonly described as a windfall tax, on exports of specified petroleum products.

- The rates are reviewed periodically, generally on a fortnightly basis, according to movements in international crude-oil and petroleum-product prices.
- The July revision followed a rise in global oil prices amid the escalation of tensions between the United States and Iran.
- As export-specific levies, the revised duties directly affect refiners' margins on overseas sales rather than constituting a corresponding increase in the tax on domestic retail sales.

APPOINTMENTS

Harjit Singh Grewal – The New National Commission for Minorities Chief

In the News: The Ministry of Minority Affairs notified the nomination of Harjit Singh Grewal as Chairperson of the National Commission for Minorities on July 16, 2026. S. Munawari Begum was nominated as Vice-Chairperson, while Glenn E. Souza Ticlo was appointed as a member of the Commission.

Key Points:

- **New Chairperson:** Harjit Singh Grewal is a senior political leader from Punjab and belongs to Dhanaula in Barnala district. He succeeds Iqbal Singh Lalpura, whose tenure as NCM Chairperson ended in April 2025.
- **Statutory Foundation:** The National Commission for Minorities is a statutory body established under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. The recent nominations were made under Sections 3 and 4 of the Act.
- **Composition of NCM:** The Commission consists of a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and five members nominated by the Central Government. At least five members, including the Chairperson, must belong to the notified minority communities.
- **Tenure:** The Chairperson and members hold office for three years from the date on which they assume charge. Their conditions of service, resignation and removal are governed by the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992.
- **Notified Minorities:** Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians or Parsis were initially notified as minority communities. The Jain community became the sixth nationally notified minority community in January 2014.

ENVIRONMENT

India's first night safari gets SC nod

In the News: The Supreme Court has conditionally approved the Kukrail Night Safari and Day Zoo project in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The ₹1,510-crore project is proposed as India's first night safari and the fifth such facility globally. Its construction must comply with all environmental and regulatory conditions.

Key Points:

- **Location and Area:** The project will be developed over approximately 855 acres within the 2,027-hectare Kukrail Reserve Forest on the outskirts of Lucknow. The reserve is an important urban green space named after the Kukrail stream, a tributary of the Gomti River.
- **Project Components:** Phase I will include the night safari and associated conservation facilities, while Phase II will include a day zoo. The design provides for naturalistic habitats, forest trails, interpretation centres, conservation breeding facilities and battery-operated visitor vehicles.
- **Nocturnal Wildlife Experience:** Special lighting will imitate natural moonlight, allowing visitors to observe nocturnal animals without causing excessive disturbance. Proposed species include Asiatic lions, Bengal tigers, leopards, hyenas, flying squirrels and gharials.
- **Environmental Conditions:** The Supreme Court directed compliance with recommendations of the Central Empowered Committee, the Central Zoo Authority and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Periodic inspections will be conducted, and separate permission will be required before trees are felled.
- **Kukrail's Conservation Importance:** Kukrail houses the Gharial Rehabilitation Centre, established in 1975 for the conservation and breeding of the critically endangered gharial. The Central Empowered Committee rejected the proposed adventure zone and did not permit the relocation of the existing Lucknow Zoo.

SCIENCE AND TECH

ISRO Conducts Three Crew Module Tests for Gaganyaan

In the News: ISRO announced that it had successfully completed three major qualification tests for the Crew Module systems of the Gaganyaan mission. The tests examined the module's upright position after splashdown, its separation from the Service Module and its structural strength during apex-cover separation.

Key Points:

- **Crew Module Up-righting System:** ISRO tested the inflation of the primary flotation system, which uses stored cold gas to keep the Crew Module upright after it lands in the sea. The test confirmed that the flotation system met functional and inflation-time requirements.
- **Umbilical Separation Test:** The Crew Module–Service Module Connect and Disconnect System provides electrical and fluid communication between the two modules. The test demonstrated clean separation and verified the structural stability of the Crew Module's panel and interfaces.
- **Apex-Cover Test:** The apex cover protects the parachutes and associated equipment during flight. ISRO applied approximately 1.75 times the estimated reaction load to a simulated Crew Module and confirmed that the structure possessed the required design margins.
- **Orbital Module:** Gaganyaan's Orbital Module consists of the habitable Crew Module and the unpressurised Service Module. The Crew Module carries the astronauts, life-support systems and re-entry equipment, while the Service Module supplies propulsion, power and thermal support.

India Ranked 9th in Internet Blackout Preparedness

In the News: India has been ranked ninth among countries considered best prepared to withstand a major internet infrastructure disruption. The ranking was released through a study conducted by TRG Datacenters, a United States-based digital infrastructure provider.

Key Points:

- **India's Position:** India received a vulnerability score of 23.4 and occupied ninth place globally. A lower score indicates stronger resilience and a greater ability to maintain internet connectivity when important network routes or infrastructure systems fail.
- **Study Coverage:** The study examined nearly 100 countries on the basis of submarine cable connectivity, internet exchange points, cybersecurity preparedness, electricity access and the proportion of the population using the internet. These indicators represent both physical connectivity and supporting digital infrastructure.
- **India's Infrastructure Indicators:** India was credited with 22 submarine cables and 40 internet exchange points. It also recorded electricity access of 99.5% and a cybersecurity score of 98.5, contributing to its place among the ten most resilient countries.
- **Leading Countries:** The United States ranked first with a vulnerability score of zero, followed by Indonesia with 10.3 and the United Kingdom with 16.2. Japan, Brazil, Australia, France and Italy also ranked above India, while Sweden completed the top ten.
- **Scope of the Ranking:** The ranking evaluates preparedness for failures caused by damaged submarine cables, power disruptions, routing faults or cyber incidents. It does not measure the number of government-ordered internet shutdowns imposed within a country for administrative or security reasons.

Karnataka Announces India's First Government-Driven AI University to Boost Innovation and Research

In the News: Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar announced on 14 July 2026 that the state would establish India's first government-driven Artificial Intelligence University. The announcement was made while inaugurating Google I/O Connect India 2026 at the Bangalore International Exhibition Centre in Bengaluru.

Key Points:

- **Purpose of the University:** The proposed university will focus on developing specialised AI talent, promoting advanced research and strengthening cooperation among universities, industries and government institutions. Responsible and inclusive use of artificial intelligence will form an important part of the institution's stated vision.

- **Proposed AI Hub:** The Karnataka government will also establish an AI Hub that will function as an incubation centre for start-ups, companies and researchers. It is intended to support research and development, commercialisation of AI solutions and collaboration between technology enterprises and academic institutions.
- **AI-Native Karnataka:** The state intends to use artificial intelligence in education, healthcare, agriculture, public administration and support for small businesses. Proposed applications include AI-assisted teaching, early disease diagnosis, agricultural advisory services and faster delivery of government services.
- **Technology Ecosystem:** Karnataka accounts for nearly 40% of India's software exports, while Bengaluru hosts more than 17,000 start-ups and numerous Global Capability Centres. This existing ecosystem is expected to provide research partnerships, employment opportunities and industry support for the proposed university.

Skyroot's Vikram-1 Set for Historic Launch as India's First Private Orbital Rocket

In the News: Skyroot Aerospace scheduled the maiden flight of Vikram-1, India's first privately developed orbital-class rocket, for July 18, 2026, from Sriharikota. The countdown was placed on a planned hold shortly before the scheduled 11:30 am liftoff. The mission remains part of a launch window extending until August 4.

Key Points:

- **Mission Aagaman:** The maiden orbital flight has been named Mission Aagaman, meaning "arrival". It is being conducted from the First Launch Pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, and aims to place multiple payloads into low Earth orbit.
- **Rocket Specifications:** Vikram-1 is a four-stage, seven-storey launch vehicle designed for small satellites. It can carry up to 350 kg to low Earth orbit and approximately 260 kg to a Sun-synchronous orbit.
- **Propulsion and Structure:** The rocket has three solid-fuel lower stages and a restartable liquid-fuel upper stage. Its carbon-composite structure and three-dimensional printed liquid engine are intended to reduce weight and support quicker manufacturing.
- **Payloads and Target Orbit:** Mission Aagaman is designed to place domestic and international technology-demonstration payloads into an orbit of about 450 km. The payload manifest includes satellites and experimental systems from Skyroot, DCUBED, Grahaa Space and CosmoServe Space.
- **Skyroot and Private Space Reforms:** Skyroot Aerospace was founded in Hyderabad in 2018 by former ISRO scientists Pawan Kumar Chandana and Naga Bharath Daka. Its Vikram-S rocket conducted India's first private rocket launch in November 2022, while the establishment of IN-SPACe in 2020 created a formal route for private companies to use national space infrastructure.

Vikram-1 Launches India's First Private Orbital Rocket

In the News: Skyroot Aerospace successfully launched Vikram-1, India's first privately developed orbital launch vehicle, on July 18, 2026. The rocket lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota under Mission Aagaman and placed its payloads in a low-Earth orbit of about 450 kilometres.

Key Pointers:

- **Mission Aagaman:** The maiden orbital flight was named Mission Aagaman, meaning "arrival". The mission demonstrated the ability of an Indian private company to develop, launch and operate an orbital-class rocket carrying customer payloads.
- **Rocket Specifications:** Vikram-1 is an all-carbon-composite launch vehicle capable of carrying payloads weighing up to 350 kilograms to low-Earth orbit. It uses solid-fuel boosters and a three-dimensional-printed liquid engine for its orbital operations.
- **Developer and Naming:** The rocket was developed by Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace, founded by former ISRO scientists Pawan Kumar Chandana and Naga Bharath Daka. The Vikram series is named after Dr Vikram Sarabhai, regarded as the father of India's space programme.
- **Payloads Carried:** The mission carried Skyroot's SCOPE satellite, DCUBED's technology-demonstration payload, Grahaa Space's SOLARAS S3 satellite and CosmoServe Space's Embrace robotic arm. Embrace has been designed to demonstrate technologies associated with capturing orbital debris.
- **Private Space Regulation:** The launch was authorised by the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre, or IN-SPACe. Vikram-1 followed the 2022 launch of Vikram-S under Mission Prarambh, which was India's first privately developed suborbital rocket mission.

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Day for International Justice

In the News: The World Day for International Justice was observed on July 17, 2026. The observance is officially promoted by the International Criminal Court system as the Day of International Criminal Justice.

Key Pointers:

The day is observed annually on July 17 to commemorate the adoption of the Rome Statute on July 17, 1998.

- The Rome Statute is the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court, the world's first permanent international criminal court.
- The observance promotes accountability, victims' rights and efforts to prevent crimes threatening international peace, security and human well-being.
- The ICC exercises jurisdiction over four principal crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.
- The Court tries individuals rather than States and functions according to the principle of complementarity, under which national courts have the primary responsibility to prosecute international crimes.
- The ICC is headquartered at The Hague in the Netherlands. It is an independent international organisation and is not a part of the United Nations, although it has a cooperation agreement with the UN.
- As of July 2026, 125 countries were parties to the Rome Statute. India is not a signatory or State Party to the treaty.

STATIC

Birth Anniversary of K. Kamaraj

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid homage to Thiru K. Kamaraj on his 123rd birth anniversary. He remembered Kamaraj as a stalwart of the freedom movement and an exceptional public figure whose life was devoted to nation-building.

Key Points:

- **Early Life and Freedom Struggle:** Kumaraswami Kamaraj was born on July 15, 1903, at Virudupatti, now Virudhunagar, in Tamil Nadu. He joined the national movement at a young age and participated in the Salt Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement, facing imprisonment several times.
- **Chief Minister of Madras State:** Kamaraj served as Chief Minister of Madras State from 1954 to 1963. His administration concentrated on rural schools, free education, school enrolment and the expansion of the noon-meal programme, earning him the title "Kalvi Thanthai" or Father of Education.
- **Development Initiatives:** His government expanded irrigation facilities, roads, electricity supply and industrial infrastructure across Madras State. Major dams and reservoirs were developed during his tenure, alongside public-sector and manufacturing projects that supported agricultural and industrial growth.
- **Kamaraj Plan:** In 1963, he proposed that senior Congress leaders holding government positions should resign and work to strengthen the party organisation. Kamaraj himself resigned as Chief Minister under the plan and later became President of the Indian National Congress.
- **National Role and Recognition:** Kamaraj served as Congress President from 1964 to 1967 and played an important role in the selection of Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi as Prime Ministers. Popularly described as the "Kingmaker", he was awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously in 1976.

The journey of Sonam Wangchuk, the activist: Education to ecology to politics

In the News: Ladakhi educator and environmental activist Sonam Wangchuk was shifted to Safdarjung Hospital in New Delhi on July 18, 2026, after his health deteriorated during the 21st day of an indefinite hunger strike. The protest sought accountability and reforms following alleged irregularities in competitive examinations.

Key Points:

- **Education Reformer:** Wangchuk is an engineer and educator who co-founded the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh in 1988. SECMOL promotes practical education, locally relevant learning and residential programmes for young people from Ladakh.
- **Operation New Hope:** In 1994, he led Operation New Hope in collaboration with government departments, village communities and civil society. The programme focused on teacher training, local learning material and community participation in the management of government schools.
- **Ecological Innovations:** Wangchuk developed the Ice Stupa technique, which stores winter water as cone-shaped artificial glaciers. The ice melts gradually during spring, supplying water when farmers in the cold desert region require it for irrigation.
- **Ladakh Movement:** His activism expanded to demands for constitutional and environmental safeguards for Ladakh, including protection of land, employment and natural resources. He has also supported demands for statehood and safeguards resembling those available under the Sixth Schedule.
- **Sixth Schedule and Recognition:** The Sixth Schedule, associated with Articles 244(2) and 275(1), presently covers tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Wangchuk received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2018 for his community-driven reforms in education and sustainable development.

SPORTS

Wimbledon Championship 2026: Full List of Winners Category Wise

In the News: The Wimbledon Championships 2026 concluded at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in London on July 12. The tournament was conducted from June 29 to July 12 on outdoor grass courts. Jannik Sinner retained the gentlemen's singles title, while Linda Noskova secured her first Grand Slam women's singles championship.

Key Points:

- **Gentlemen's Singles:** Italy's Jannik Sinner defeated Germany's Alexander Zverev 6-7(7), 7-6(2), 6-3, 6-4 in the final. Sinner successfully defended his Wimbledon title and registered his fifth Grand Slam singles championship and his 100th Grand Slam match victory.
- **Ladies' Singles:** Czech Republic's Linda Noskova defeated compatriot Karolina Muchova 6-2, 5-7, 6-3. The victory gave the 21-year-old Noskova her first Grand Slam singles title following an all-Czech championship match on Centre Court.
- **Gentlemen's Doubles:** Harri Heliövaara of Finland and Henry Patten of Britain defeated Marcelo Arevalo of El Salvador and Mate Pavić of Croatia 7-6(4), 7-6(3). Heliövaara and Patten claimed their second Wimbledon doubles title as a partnership.
- **Ladies' Doubles:** China's Guo Hanyu and France's Kristina Mladenovic defeated Gabriela Dabrowski of Canada and Luisa Stefani of Brazil 6-3, 7-5. It was the pair's first Wimbledon women's doubles championship together.
- **Mixed Doubles and Prize Money:** Marcelo Arevalo and Jelena Ostapenko defeated Australians Marc Polmans and Storm Hunter 4-6, 7-5, 6-2 in the mixed doubles final. The total prize-money fund for Wimbledon 2026 was £64.2 million, with the gentlemen's and ladies' singles champions receiving £3.6 million each.

Delhi unveils Mayur mascot for Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships

In the News: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta unveiled 'Mayur', the official mascot of the 22nd Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships, on 14 July 2026. The official promotional trailer for the championship was also released during the ceremony.

Key Points:

- **Tournament Schedule:** The seven-day championship will be held from 27 July to 2 August 2026 at the Thyagaraj Stadium in New Delhi. The final matches of the tournament are scheduled to take place on 2 August.
- **Mascot Design:** 'Mayur' is inspired by the peacock, India's national bird. It represents energy, enthusiasm, vibrancy and positivity, while its feathers contain elements depicting the flags of participating Commonwealth countries.
- **International Participation:** Top table tennis players from more than 25 Commonwealth countries are expected to participate. The countries include England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, Nigeria, South Africa, Scotland, Wales, Kenya and Jamaica.

- **Organising Bodies:** The championship is being jointly organised by the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Table Tennis Federation of India. Thyagaraj Stadium will serve as the main competition and ceremonial venue.

