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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Mid-Day meal milk dilution controversy

In the News: Two separate incidents in Uttar Pradesh have exposed serious malpractice in the implementation of the government's Mid-Day Meal Scheme. In Chopan block (Sonbhadra district), a cook at Salai Banwa Primary School was caught on video mixing just 1 litre of milk into a bucket of water to serve 81 students. A similar incident was reported from Mahoba district, where a school cook mixed two 500ml Amul milk packets into a large bucket of water for 50 students — in the presence of the school principal, who was also found asleep on duty. The principal, Monika Soni, was suspended with immediate effect following public outrage.

Key Points:
- **Incident 1 – Chopan Block, Sonbhadra:** At Salai Banwa Primary School in Chopan block, Uttar Pradesh in 2019, a cook was filmed mixing just 1 litre of milk into a full bucket of water. This heavily diluted mixture was then served to 81 students as part of their Mid-Day Meal. The video went viral on social media, prompting officials to take cognisance. Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) Gorakhnath Patel ordered an inquiry and warned of stern action against those found responsible.
- **Incident 2 – Mahoba District (Dhikwaha, Kabrai Block):** A school cook was filmed in 2026 mixing two half-litre Amul milk packets (total: 1 litre) into a large bucket of water at a government school in Mahoba's Dhikwaha area. This diluted mixture was intended for 50 students. The incident occurred in the presence of the school principal. The video was filmed and uploaded in 2026 by a local resident, sparking immediate outrage.
- **Principal Found Asleep on Duty:** The Mahoba incident video also showed Principal Monika Soni asleep on school premises during duty hours. This added to public outrage and drew the attention of education authorities and the state government.
- **Government Norms Violated:** As per government mandates under the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, every student is entitled to: fresh, well-cooked meals daily, and 200ml of pure local or packaged milk per child per day. Both incidents directly violated these standards by drastically diluting the prescribed milk quantity per student.
- **About the Mid-Day Meal Scheme:** The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme is a centrally sponsored programme launched to improve the nutritional status of school-age children in India. It provides free cooked meals to students in government and government-aided schools. The scheme aims to increase school enrolment, reduce dropout rates, and address classroom hunger, particularly benefiting children from economically weaker sections.

India's first 'cow culture' museum to open in U.P.'s Mathura

In the News: India's first Cow Culture Museum is set to come up in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. The announcement was made by the Uttar Pradesh Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad following a meeting of district and Parishad officials. The museum will be established on the campus of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Veterinary Science University, Mathura, and is being developed on the directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. It aims to showcase the religious, cultural, spiritual, and scientific significance of the cow to the general public.

Key Points:
- **Announcement & Initiative:** India's first Cow Culture Museum was announced by the Uttar Pradesh Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad on Sunday, following a district-level meeting held in Mathura. The project is being developed on the directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and is intended to strengthen the cultural identity of the Braj region.

- **Location:** The museum will be set up on the campus of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Veterinary Science University in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. A team of officials, including the District Magistrate and Parishad representatives, has already inspected the proposed site.
- **About Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad:** The Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad is a government body established to preserve and promote the heritage of the Braj region — the cultural and religious landscape associated with Lord Krishna, centred around Mathura and Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Key Features & Exhibits:** Approximately 100 digital and physical models of cattle will be displayed. These will cover all major cattle breeds found across India as well as endangered species, providing future generations a comprehensive understanding of India's rich cow heritage. A running exhibition dedicated to cow milk and its products will be the major attraction, with modern techniques used to educate visitors about their nutritional and Ayurvedic benefits.
- **Dairy Parlour:** A dairy parlour will also be developed on the museum premises, where visitors can purchase and taste pure dairy products. This will offer a hands-on experience of India's cow-based rural economy.
- **Tradition Meets Science:** Agra Divisional Commissioner Nagendra Pratap described the museum as a unique amalgamation of tradition and science. It is designed to foster a holistic understanding of cow conservation — going beyond religious faith to also highlight the practical, scientific, and economic relevance of cattle in Indian life.

Indias Strategic Autonomy Intact Despite U.S Trade Deal: Jaishankar in Munich
In the News: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, speaking at the Munich Security Conference on February 14–15, 2026, firmly asserted that India's strategic autonomy remains intact despite the recently announced interim trade framework with the United States.

Key Points:
- **Context – Background:** India and the United States announced an interim trade framework recently. US President Trump's executive order accompanying the deal stated that India had 'committed to stop directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil' and would purchase US energy products. The deal also lifted a 25% penalty tariff on India but warned of punitive action if India imported Russian oil. This triggered sharp attacks from the Indian Opposition, accusing the government of 'surrendering' to Washington. Jaishankar's Munich address was seen as India's public rebuttal.
- **Rubio's Claim vs. Jaishankar's Response:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told MSC 2026: "In our conversations with India, we have gotten their commitment to stop buying additional Russian oil." In response, Jaishankar reiterated that India's oil procurement is guided by commercial considerations — availability, cost, and risk — and not by political mandates.
- **India's Stand on Strategic Autonomy:** Jaishankar emphasised that strategic autonomy is deeply embedded in India's history and national evolution, and cuts across India's entire political spectrum. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had earlier echoed this, saying India's energy sourcing would be guided by national interest.
- **Jaishankar on IMEC:** On the India–Europe–Middle East Corridor (IMEC), Jaishankar acknowledged that the project is progressing but not at the initially expected pace due to the ongoing conflict in West Asia. He clarified that IMEC is a connectivity project and should not be conflated with the Palestinian question, though India holds a 'longstanding' position on Palestinian statehood.
- **Jaishankar on Multilateral Diplomacy:** At MSC 2026, Jaishankar also met G7 Foreign Ministers, reiterating India's support for the UN80 reform agenda — particularly meaningful reform of the UN Security Council. He highlighted India's role in safeguarding sea lines of communication, port security, and submarine cable infrastructure.

Assam Gets Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu, Northeast's First Emergency Landing Facility
In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated major infrastructure projects in Assam worth over ₹5,450 crore. These include the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu — a landmark bridge over the Brahmaputra River in Guwahati — and the

Northeast's first Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) on a national highway in Dibrugarh district, aimed at boosting connectivity, strategic preparedness and regional development.

Key Points:

- **Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu:** The bridge is 2.86 km long with six lanes and was built at a cost of approximately ₹3,030 crore. It is the first extradosed Prestressed Concrete (PSC) bridge in Northeast India, connecting Guwahati with North Guwahati and reducing travel time between the two sides to just seven minutes.
- **Connectivity & Pilgrimage:** The bridge significantly enhances access to the Kamakhya Temple and strengthens urban mobility across the Brahmaputra, benefiting daily commuters, businesses and pilgrims alike.
- **Advanced Engineering:** The bridge incorporates base isolation technology using friction pendulum bearings to handle the region's high seismic activity, and uses high-performance stay cables for long-term durability.
- **Bridge Health Monitoring System (BHMS):** A real-time BHMS has been installed to enable continuous structural monitoring, early damage detection and enhanced safety throughout the bridge's service life.
- **Northeast's First Emergency Landing Facility (ELF):** The ELF was inaugurated on the Moran Bypass in Dibrugarh district, developed in coordination with the Indian Air Force (IAF). It is a dual-use infrastructure capable of supporting both military and civilian aircraft during emergencies. IAF jets including the Sukhoi Su-30MKI and Dassault Rafale performed successful take-offs and landings, witnessed by nearly one lakh people.
- **Technical Specifications of ELF:** The 4.2-km reinforced concrete stretch can handle fighter aircraft up to 40 tonnes and transport aircraft with a maximum take-off weight of up to 74 tonnes. It has no central road divider to allow smooth aircraft movement, with fencing on both sides for operational readiness.

Why Is India Building an Underground Railway in the Chicken's Neck? Big Strategic Move Explained
In the News: India has announced a major underground railway project in the Siliguri Corridor, also known as the Chicken's Neck — the country's only land link to the Northeast. Indian Railways has planned a 35.76 km underground railway line connecting Tinmile Hat, Rangapani and Bagdogra under the Katihar Division of Northeast Frontier Railway, aimed at strengthening defence logistics, disaster resilience and secure connectivity to the North-eastern States.

Key Points:

- **About the Siliguri Corridor:** The Siliguri Corridor is India's only land connection to the Northeast, approximately 22 km wide. Bordered by Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, it is highly strategically sensitive. Any disruption here can impact transport, defence movement and economic supply chains across eight North-eastern States.
- **Route and Length:** The underground line will run from Tinmile Hat through Rangapani to Bagdogra, covering a total of 35.76 km. The Dumdangi–Rangapani section alone spans 33.40 km. It will pass through Darjeeling and Uttar Dinajpur districts of West Bengal and Kishanganj district of Bihar.
- **Need for Underground Alignment:** The tunnel-based route provides a protected, non-visible alignment, reducing vulnerability to floods, landslides and external threats. It ensures uninterrupted rail connectivity even during emergencies — a critical requirement for this geographically sensitive corridor.
- **Strategic Importance:** The corridor is close to Bagdogra Air Force Station and Bengdubi Army Cantonment. The underground railway enables smooth movement of defence personnel, military equipment and relief materials in emergencies, strengthening rail–air logistics integration near Bagdogra.

JP Nadda to Launch SAHI & BODH at India AI Summit
In the News: Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Shri Jagat Prakash Nadda, launched two key national initiatives — SAHI (Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India) and BODH (Benchmarking Open Data Platform for

Health AI) — at the India AI Summit 2026 held at Bharat Mandapam. These initiatives mark a significant step in building a safe, ethical, and globally competitive Health AI ecosystem in India.

Key Points:

- **Event:** The launch took place at the India AI Summit 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, with Union Health Minister JP Nadda unveiling both initiatives aimed at transforming AI adoption in India's healthcare sector.
- **SAHI — What it is:** SAHI stands for Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare for India. It is a national guidance framework to enable the safe, ethical, evidence-based, and inclusive adoption of Artificial Intelligence across India's healthcare system.
- **BODH — What it is:** BODH stands for Benchmarking Open Data Platform for Health AI. It is a privacy-preserving benchmarking platform that enables rigorous evaluation of AI models using diverse, real-world health data — without sharing the underlying datasets. It was developed by IIT Kanpur in collaboration with the National Health Authority (NHA).
- **BODH as a Digital Public Good:** BODH functions as a digital public good under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM). It is designed to strengthen trust, transparency, and quality assurance in Health AI deployment across India.
- **AI in Indian Healthcare Context:** Artificial Intelligence is being increasingly used globally for diagnostics, disease prediction, medical imaging, and personalized treatment. In India, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission aims to create an integrated health data ecosystem. Health AI has the potential to improve rural healthcare access, reduce diagnostic errors, and optimize hospital management.

MILAN Village Opens in Visakhapatnam — Indian Navy Kicks Off Exercise MILAN 2026

In the News: The Indian Navy inaugurated the MILAN Village at the Eastern Naval Command, Visakhapatnam, as part of its flagship international naval exercise, MILAN 2026. The inauguration was presided over by Vice Admiral Sanjay Bhalla, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, marking the beginning of one of the largest multilateral naval exercises in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key Points:

- **MILAN Village Inauguration:** The MILAN Village was formally inaugurated on February 15, 2026, at the Eastern Naval Command by Vice Admiral Sanjay Bhalla. It has been conceptualised as an experience zone bringing together delegates and naval personnel from over 70 countries in an atmosphere of camaraderie and friendship, serving as a hub for social and cultural exchanges beyond professional engagement.
- **Theme of MILAN Village:** The MILAN Village embodies the theme "Camaraderie, Cooperation, Collaboration", symbolizing the shared commitment of participating navies to mutual cultural exchange, building bridges of friendship, and forging collective maritime partnerships.
- **Exercise MILAN 2026 — Overview:** Exercise MILAN 2026 will be held at Visakhapatnam from February 15 to 25, 2026. It is one of the largest multilateral naval exercises in the Indo-Pacific, bringing together navies from across the globe to strengthen interoperability, maritime domain awareness, and collective response capabilities.
- **Harbour and Sea Phases:** The exercise will include complex maritime operations such as anti-submarine warfare, air defence, search and rescue, and cooperative security missions, reinforcing a shared commitment to free, open, inclusive, and rules-based seas.
- **India's Maritime Convergence:** Exercise MILAN 2026 forms a key pillar of India's historic maritime convergence at Visakhapatnam, alongside the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026 and the IONS (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium) Conclave of Chiefs — a significant moment in India's maritime outreach and cooperative engagement with partner navies.
- **MAHASAGAR Vision:** MILAN 2026 represents a major operational manifestation of Prime Minister's MAHASAGAR vision, reaffirming India's role as a Preferred Security Partner and a responsible stakeholder in the global maritime commons.

President Droupadi Murmu Flags Off Ol Chiki 100 Year Celebrations in Delhi

In the News: President of India Smt. Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the Centenary Celebrations of the Ol Chiki Script at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi. The event, organised by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with Fagun (a monthly Santhali newspaper), marked 100 years of the Ol Chiki script, invented in 1925 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu for the Santhali language.

Key Points:

- **Inauguration:** President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the centenary celebrations as Chief Guest. The event was also attended by Union Minister of Tribal Affairs Shri Jual Oram and Union Minister of Culture & Tourism Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.
- **About Ol Chiki Script:** The Ol Chiki script was invented in 1925 by Pandit Raghunath Murmu to give the Santhali language its own dedicated, scientifically designed writing system. The script consists of 30 letters, each corresponding directly to a specific sound, and accurately captures the unique phonetic features of Santhali — including glottal stops and distinctive vowel patterns — which borrowed scripts like Roman, Devanagari, Odia, and Bengali could not correctly represent.
- **About Pandit Raghunath Murmu:** Born in 1905 in Dandbose village of Mayurbhanj district, Odisha, Pandit Raghunath Murmu is the visionary architect of the Ol Chiki script. He authored over 150 works in Santhali, including the first book in Ol Chiki — "High Serena" (1936). He received an honorary doctorate from Ranchi University and honours from the Odisha Sahitya Akademi. His dedication to cultural preservation earned him the honorary title of "Pandit".
- **Santhali Language:** Santhali belongs to the Munda branch of the Austroasiatic language family and is spoken primarily across Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar in India, as well as in Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Mauritius. It was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India through the 92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003, with Ol Chiki as its official script.
- **Commemorative Coin and Postage Stamp:** President Murmu released a ₹100 commemorative coin and a special commemorative postage stamp to mark 100 years of the Ol Chiki script (1925–2025). The coin's reverse features the portrait of Pandit Raghunath Murmu set against Ol Chiki characters, while its obverse bears the Lion Capital of Ashoka with the denomination.
- **Constitution in Santhali:** In a landmark initiative, the Constitution of India was translated into the Santhali language using the Ol Chiki script and released in December 2025 by the Legislative Department — the first time India's foundational legal text became available in Santhali in its own indigenous script, strengthening participatory democracy and constitutional awareness.

Why the new Digital Personal Data Protection Act faces a constitutional challenge in the Supreme Court

In the News: Three separate PIL petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court of India challenging the constitutionality of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act). The petitioners argue that the Act — enacted to safeguard digital privacy — paradoxically undermines the fundamental Right to Information (RTI), handicaps investigative journalism, and expands state surveillance powers. The Supreme Court admitted the pleas, issued notice to the Centre, and listed them for hearing by a Constitution Bench of five judges in March, while declining to place an interim stay on the Act.

Key Points:

- **Petitioners:** The three petitions have been filed by the National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information (NCPRI) — a civil society network instrumental in enacting the RTI Act; Venkatesh Nayak, a transparency advocate; and The Reporters' Collective Trust, a group of investigative journalists.

- **Central Challenge — Amendment to RTI Act:** A core grievance of all three petitioners concerns Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, which amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005. The original provision allowed denial of personal information only if it had no relation to public activity or caused an unwarranted privacy invasion — and crucially contained a public interest override allowing PIOs to disclose personal information if larger public interest justified it.
- **Impact on RTI and Anti-Corruption Efforts:** The NCPRI contends this amendment converts a "carefully calibrated privacy exemption into an absolute bar", shielding corrupt officials from scrutiny. Investigations into corruption rely on records like asset disclosures, tender documents, and file notations — which inevitably contain personal data. Venkatesh Nayak's petition calls this a "death knell for participatory democracy" and ruinous to open governance.
- **Proportionality Test — Puttaswamy Judgment:** All three petitions invoke the Supreme Court's landmark Puttaswamy judgment of 2017, which mandates that any restriction on fundamental rights must satisfy the "proportionality test" — requiring the state to prove a legitimate aim, use of the least restrictive measure, and procedural safeguards. The petitioners argue the DPDP Act fails this threshold by replacing the RTI Act's public interest override with a blanket ban, which is not the least restrictive method available. The NCPRI also argues the amendment is "manifestly arbitrary" as it creates a class of information that is completely opaque regardless of public interest.
- **State Surveillance Concerns — Section 36:** Both Nayak and the Reporters' Collective challenge Section 36 of the Act, which empowers the Union government to call for information from any data fiduciary without procedural safeguards, independent authorisation, or any right of appeal or review. The Reporters' Collective warns this could force media organisations to hand over data revealing the identity of anonymous sources, deterring potential informants.
- **Supreme Court's Response:** The Supreme Court admitted all three petitions and issued notice to the Centre. The matter has been listed for hearing before a Constitution Bench of five judges in March. However, the Court declined to grant an interim stay on the DPDP Act, meaning the law remains in force pending the constitutional hearing.

Gujarat Paves the Way for Women's Workforce Expansion with Landmark Bill

In the News: The Gujarat Assembly unanimously passed the Gujarat Shops and Establishments (Amendment) Bill, 2026, introduced by Labour Minister Kunvarji Bavaliya. The landmark amendment permits night shifts for women, increases daily working hours, and raises the overtime limit — replacing an ordinance issued in December 2025.

Key Points:
- **Night Shifts for Women:** The amendment formally permits women to work night shifts between 9 pm and 6 am, with employment strictly subject to the woman employee's consent. Mandatory safeguards include rest rooms and ladies' toilets, night crèche facilities, protection of dignity and honour, measures against sexual harassment, and transportation from workplace to residence.
- **Revised Working Hours:** Daily working hours have been increased from 9 to 10 hours, while the weekly cap remains unchanged at 48 hours. No employee can work continuously beyond 6 hours without a mandatory 30-minute break. This change provides operational flexibility to establishments while retaining worker protection norms.
- **Overtime Limit Raised:** The quarterly overtime limit has been raised from 125 hours to 144 hours per quarter (3 months). Overtime wage protection remains intact — overtime must be paid at twice the ordinary wage rate, safeguarding workers' compensation rights during peak-staffing periods.
- **Government Oversight Retained:** Despite permitting night shifts for women, the state government retains authority to prohibit or regulate women's employment between 9 pm and 6 am, based on public interest considerations. This ensures flexibility for future restrictions in specific sectors or regions if required.
- **Legislative Background:** The provisions were first introduced via an ordinance in December 2025, when the Assembly was not in session. The Amendment Bill now replaces that ordinance with formal legislative backing. While

the Bill was passed unanimously, the Opposition extended support in implementation, and the government assured strict enforcement of all safeguards.

Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti 2026: Why 19 February Is a Day of Pride, Courage and Swarajya

In the News: Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti 2026 was celebrated on February 19, 2026, across India — especially in Maharashtra — to honour the 396th birth anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the founder of the Maratha Empire. The day commemorates his ideals of Swarajya (self-rule), military brilliance, just governance, and cultural pride.

Key Points:

- **Birth & Early Life:** Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was born on February 19, 1630, at Shivneri Fort in present-day Maharashtra, to Shahajiraje Bhosale and Jijabai. His mother Jijabai was instrumental in shaping his values of courage, justice, and discipline. His mentor Dadoji Konddev provided military training and administrative knowledge from an early age. He captured Torna Fort at just 16 years of age, marking the beginning of his Swarajya campaign.
- **Coronation & Reign:** Shivaji Maharaj was crowned Chhatrapati on June 6, 1674, at Raigad Fort — becoming the first Chhatrapati of the Maratha Empire. His reign (1674–1680) established a strong, people-centric kingdom built on merit-based appointments, fair governance, and protection of all communities regardless of religion.
- **Military Genius:** He pioneered guerrilla warfare (Ganimi Kava), using surprise attacks, speed, and the strategic advantage of the Sahyadri mountain ranges. He built or strengthened over 300 forts, including Raigad, Sinhagad, and Pratapgad. Notably, he also established a powerful naval force to protect India's western coastline — making him one of India's earliest naval strategists.
- **Administrative Excellence:** Shivaji Maharaj established an efficient revenue system, appointed ministers based on merit rather than caste or religion, protected farmers, and ensured justice without discrimination. He promoted Marathi and Sanskrit as official languages, reviving Indian court culture and traditions. His governance model is still studied for its fairness and efficiency.
- **History of the Jayanti Celebration:** Social reformer Mahatma Jyotirao Phule first initiated the public celebration of Shivaji Jayanti in 1870 to highlight his contributions to society. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak later popularised it in the late 19th century as a tool to inspire nationalism and unity during the freedom movement, making it a symbol of resistance and self-respect.

Death Penalty in India

In the News: The Square Circle Clinic (formerly Project 39A) at NALSAR University of Law published the "Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics Report 2025," revealing alarming systemic failures — including the Supreme Court not confirming a single death sentence for the third consecutive year, and acquittal rates far outpacing confirmation rates across Indian courts.

Key Points:

- **Report's Key Findings:** For the third consecutive year, the Supreme Court confirmed zero death sentences in 2025. It acquitted 10 death row prisoners — the highest in a decade — and decided in favour of acquittal in over 50% of cases it heard. Over the last decade, High Courts acquitted 326 persons (34.65%) from death row, a rate nearly four times the confirmation rate of 8.31%. The death row population stands at 574 as of December 2025, the highest since 2016, with Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra holding the largest shares.
- **About the Death Penalty in India:** Capital punishment is the execution of an offender convicted by a court of law, rooted in retributive justice. Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, approximately 14 offence categories attract the death penalty, including murder, terrorism, mob lynching resulting in death, and rape of a minor. Juveniles, pregnant women, and mentally ill persons are exempt from execution.

- **Appellate Process & Legal Recourse:** A Sessions Court death sentence must be confirmed by the High Court; the accused can further appeal to the Supreme Court. Additional remedies include a Mercy Petition to the President (Article 72) or Governor (Article 161), and a Curative Petition (evolved in Rupa Ashok Hurra v. Ashok Hurra, 2002) to cure a gross miscarriage of justice.
- **Key Supreme Court Judgements:** Jagmohan Singh v. State of U.P. (1973) upheld the constitutional validity of the death penalty. Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab (1980) established the "rarest of rare" doctrine, requiring courts to weigh aggravating against mitigating circumstances. Shatrughan Chauhan v. Union of India (2014) ruled that undue delay in execution amounts to torture and is grounds for commutation. Manoj v. State of M.P. (2022) made mitigation reports mandatory before sentencing.
- **Life Without Remission (LWOR) Concerns:** A growing trend sees courts imposing "life imprisonment without remission" or fixed-term sentences (some up to 60 years) as an alternative to death. 58.83% of High Court commutations and 61.97% of Supreme Court commutations resulted in LWOR sentences.
- **Law Commission's Evolving Stance:** The 35th Report (1967) strongly supported the death penalty. The 187th Report (2003) acknowledged procedural flaws without advocating abolition. The 262nd Report (2015) recommended abolishing the death penalty for all crimes except terrorism and waging war against the state.

Rajya Sabha Elections

In the News: The Election Commission of India (ECI) announced the schedule for biennial elections to fill 37 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 states. Notifications will be issued on February 26, nominations can be filed till March 5, and polling is scheduled for March 16, 2026.

Key Points:
- **Election Schedule & Seats:** 37 seats are falling vacant across 10 states — Maharashtra (7), Tamil Nadu (6), Bihar (5), West Bengal (5), Odisha (4), Assam (3), Telangana (2), Chhattisgarh (2), Haryana (2), and Himachal Pradesh (1). Notable outgoing members include Union Ministers Ramnath Thakur and Ramdas Athawale, Deputy Chairman Harivansh, Sharad Pawar, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, and M. Thambidurai.
- **About Rajya Sabha:** The Rajya Sabha (Council of States) is the Upper House of the Indian Parliament. Under Article 80, its maximum strength is 250 — 238 elected representatives of States/UTs and 12 members nominated by the President for expertise in literature, science, art, and social service. Currently, it has 245 members. Seats are allocated to States/UTs based on population as per the Fourth Schedule.
- **Eligibility (Article 84):** A candidate must be an Indian citizen, at least 30 years of age, and take a prescribed oath. Post the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2003, a candidate can be an elector from any parliamentary constituency in India (domicile requirement removed).
- **Tenure & Continuity:** The Rajya Sabha is a permanent House and cannot be dissolved. Members serve a six-year term, with one-third retiring every two years. Bye-elections fill vacancies caused by resignation, death, or disqualification, with the elected member serving only the remainder of the original term.
- **Open Ballot System:** Voting is not secret for MLAs belonging to political parties — they must show their marked ballot to the party's authorized agent before submitting it, to prevent cross-voting. Independent MLAs are exempt from this requirement.
- **Anti-Defection & NOTA:** The Supreme Court ruled that voting against the party whip in Rajya Sabha elections does not attract disqualification under the 10th Schedule (Anti-Defection Law), though the party may take disciplinary action. NOTA was scrapped for Rajya Sabha elections by the Supreme Court in 2018 (Shailesh Manubhai Parmar vs. Union of India), as it defeats the principle of proportional representation.

India Revises Base Year of Merchandise Trade Indices to 2022–23

In the News: The Ministry of Commerce & Industry announced that the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S) has revised the base year of India's Merchandise Trade Indices from FY 2012–13 to FY 2022–23 (2022–23 = 100), to better reflect the current structure of India's external trade.

Key Points:
- **About DGCI&S:** The Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S) is an arm of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry. It compiles and publishes Merchandise Trade Indices to measure changes in unit values (prices) of India's exports and imports over time.
- **What are Merchandise Trade Indices?** These indices serve as important indicators of external sector price movements and are widely used for economic analysis, including national accounts compilation and assessment of terms of trade. They cover Export/Import Unit Value Indices (UVI), Quantity Indices (QI), and Terms of Trade across various classification levels.
- **Why the Revision?** Over the past decade, India's trade basket has undergone substantial changes due to emergence of new commodities, technological advancements, global supply chain restructuring, and changes in relative price structures. The earlier base year (2012–13) no longer adequately reflected the prevailing trade structure, necessitating an update.
- **Committee for Revision:** The revision was undertaken on the recommendations of a committee constituted by DGCI&S under the Chairmanship of Prof. Nachiketa Chattopadhyay, Professor, Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata. The Committee examined existing methodology, data coverage, weighting structure, and compilation practices, recommending refinements in line with international best practices.
- **Key Features of the Revised Series:** The new series carries an updated base year of FY 2022–23, a revised commodity basket at the Principal Commodity (PC) level to better capture emerging and declining trade items, an updated weighting structure based on trade values of the new base year, and improved methodology for selection of the common commodity basket and treatment of missing unit values.
- **Types of Indices Compiled:** The revised series includes Monthly, Quarterly and Annual Export/Import Unit Value Indices; Principal Commodity (PC) Classification-wise, SITC-wise, and Broad Economic Categories (BEC)-wise Trade Indices; Bilateral and Region-wise Trade Indices of India's Top 20 Export and Import partner nations; and Terms of Trade comprising Gross, Net, and Income Terms of Trade.

23rd Foundation Day of National Commission for Scheduled Tribes

In the News: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs celebrated the 23rd Foundation Day of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) at the Civil Services Officers Institute, Vinay Marg, New Delhi. Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Shri Jual Oram graced the occasion as Chief Guest and released the "NCST Handbook" detailing the Commission's functioning and responsibilities.

Key Points:
- **About NCST:** NCST is a constitutional body established under Article 338-A of the Constitution through the 89th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003. It was created by bifurcating the earlier combined National Commission for SCs and STs to provide focused attention on the distinct problems and developmental needs of tribal communities.
- **Composition:** The Commission consists of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and 3 other Members (including at least one woman Member), all appointed by the President by warrant under his hand and seal. Their conditions of service and tenure are also determined by the President.
- **Tenure and Ranks:** The Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and other Members serve a 3-year term and are not eligible for appointment for more than two terms. The Chairperson holds the rank of Union Cabinet Minister, the Vice-Chairperson holds the rank of Minister of State, and other Members hold the rank of Secretary to the Government of India.

- **Core Functions:** NCST investigates and monitors constitutional and legal safeguards for STs, inquires into specific complaints regarding deprivation of rights, participates in socio-economic development planning, evaluates development progress, submits reports to the President, and makes recommendations to Union and state governments.
- **Powers:** NCST possesses civil court powers for investigations — it can summon persons, require document production, receive affidavits, and requisition public records. It is also empowered to regulate its own procedure.
- **Constitutional Provisions Related to STs:** Article 366(25) defines Scheduled Tribes as tribes or tribal communities deemed under Article 342 to be STs for the purposes of the Constitution. Article 342(1) empowers the President to specify tribes as STs in consultation with the Governor for states. The Fifth Schedule governs Scheduled Areas and STs in states other than Sixth Schedule states, while the Sixth Schedule provides Autonomous District Councils for tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram.

INTERNATIONAL

The 62nd Munich Security Conference
In the News: The 62nd Munich Security Conference (MSC 2026) took place from February 13–15, 2026, at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof in Munich, Germany. Chaired by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, the conference brought together heads of state and government and 1,000+ participants to debate the most pressing global security challenges. This year's conference unfolded at what organisers described as a "fundamental inflection point" for the international order, with the Munich Security Report 2026 titled Under Destruction warning of an era of 'wrecking-ball politics.'

Key Points:
- **About MSC 2026:** The Munich Security Conference is the world's leading annual forum for international security policy. The 62nd edition (MSC 2026) was held from February 13–15, 2026, primarily at Hotel Bayerischer Hof and the Rosewood Munich. It is chaired by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger. Over 1,000 participants attended, including 50+ heads of state/government, 100+ foreign and defence ministers, and ~450 representatives from politics, academia, and the defence industry.
- **Theme & Tone:** MSC 2026 took place at what organisers called a "fundamental inflection point" for global security. Key topics included: European security and defence, the future of the transatlantic relationship, revitalisation of multilateralism, competing visions of the global order, regional conflicts (Ukraine, Gaza, West Asia), and security implications of technological advances (AI, drones, space).
- **Munich Security Report 2026 – 'Under Destruction':** The intellectual backbone of MSC 2026, this report argues that the US-led post-1945 international order is now "under destruction." It declares the world has entered a period of 'wrecking-ball politics.' US President Donald Trump is described as "the most powerful of those who take the axe to existing rules and institutions."
- **Ukraine & Russia:** Ukraine remained a central subject. Deliberations covered the ongoing war with Russia, prospects for diplomatic resolution, and the sustainability of Western military and financial support for Kyiv. European concerns about evolving US policy toward Russia were a key part of the debate.
- **The Munich Rule:** All MSC 2026 proceedings are governed by the 'Munich Rule': Engage and interact — don't lecture or ignore one another. All speakers are expected to stand ready to answer questions and engage with the audience at eye level, both on and off stage.
- **India's Relevance:** EAM S. Jaishankar's presence at MSC 2026 underscores India's growing role in global security diplomacy. India's participation positions it as an important voice on multilateralism, regional stability, and the evolving global order amid shifting US–Europe–Asia dynamics.

India To Hosts First-Ever Global South AI Impact Summit 2026
In the News: India hosted the first-ever global AI summit in the Global South — the AI Impact Summit 2026 — at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The five-day summit brought together world leaders, policymakers, industry experts and

international organizations from over 100 invited countries to shape the future of Artificial Intelligence governance and cooperation, with ministerial delegations from more than 45 nations attending.

Key Points:

- **Historic First:** The AI Impact Summit 2026 is the first-ever global AI summit hosted in the Global South. It was announced by PM Narendra Modi at the France AI Action Summit and builds on the momentum of prior forums including the UK AI Safety Summit, AI Seoul Summit, and Global AI Summit on Africa.
- **Theme, Venue and Scale:** The Summit, themed "Sarvajana Hitaya, Sarvajana Sukhaya — Welfare for All, Happiness for All". The summit is being held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. Over 100 countries were invited, 20 Heads of Government and over 50 international ministers are attending underscoring its global significance.
- **India's Role:** India is positioning itself as a bridge between developed and developing nations in shaping responsible AI policies. Hosting this summit strengthens India's leadership in global digital governance and digital diplomacy.
- **Three Sutras (Core Pillars):** The summit is anchored on three foundational pillars called 'Sutras' (Sanskrit for guiding principles): (1) People — human-centric AI ensuring inclusion, dignity and safety; (2) Planet — sustainable AI aligned with climate and environmental goals; (3) Progress — inclusive growth through democratized AI access in health, education, governance and agriculture.
- **Seven Chakras (Thematic Working Groups):** Summit discussions are organised into seven 'Chakras' or working groups: Human Capital; Inclusion for Social Empowerment; Safe and Trusted AI; Science; Resilience, Innovation and Efficiency; Democratizing AI Resources; and AI for Economic Growth and Social Good.
- **Global AI Governance Background:** The past four years have seen a surge in multilateral AI initiatives: G20 AI Principles, UN and GPAI Resolutions on AI and the Hamburg Declaration on Responsible AI, all reflecting the need for coordinated global action on AI.

Modi, Macron Launch India-France Innovation Year

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron jointly launched the India-France Year of Innovation 2026, themed 'Igniting the Future,' in Mumbai. Macron arrived in India for a three-day official visit (February 17–19), marking his first-ever visit to Mumbai and fourth visit to India. The two leaders held bilateral talks at Lok Bhavan, reviewed the Horizon 2047 Roadmap, and addressed a gathering of startup founders, researchers and industrial innovators from both nations.

Key Points:

- **India-France Year of Innovation 2026:** PM Modi and President Macron officially launched the 'India-France Year of Innovation 2026' themed 'Igniting the Future.' It is a cross-sectoral initiative designed to institutionalise collaboration between start-ups, researchers and technology leaders across AI, clean energy, defence technology, space and DeepTech.
- **Macron's Visit to India:** President Macron's three-day visit (February 17–19, 2026) comes exactly a year after PM Modi's visit to France. This is Macron's first-ever visit to Mumbai and fourth visit to India. He was received by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Governor Acharya Devvrat at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport.
- **Horizon 2047 Roadmap:** The two leaders reviewed the Horizon 2047 Roadmap — a strategic blueprint for the next 25 years of India-France partnership — first published during PM Modi's visit to France in July 2023. It outlines cooperation across three pillars: Security and Sovereignty, Planet, and People.
- **Key Pillars of Innovation Year:** The Year of Innovation 2026 focuses on three key areas: (1) Artificial Intelligence — accelerating joint R&D in ethical AI; (2) DeepTech and Space — strengthening satellite technology and space

exploration ties; (3) Digital Sovereignty — ensuring both nations maintain control over critical data and digital infrastructure.

- **Defence Cooperation:** Defence ties remain a cornerstone of the strategic partnership. India's Defence Acquisitions Council approved procurement of 114 Rafale fighter aircraft from France — 18 in flyaway condition and the rest 96 to be manufactured in India. India already operates 36 Rafale jets in its Air Force and has ordered 26 naval variants for the Navy.

- **Consulate and ITER Visit:** During PM Modi's February 2025 France visit, both leaders jointly inaugurated India's Consulate General in Marseille and visited the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) facility, reflecting deepening scientific cooperation.

Magnus Carlsen Crowned 2026 FIDE Freestyle World Champion

In the News: Magnus Carlsen of Norway won the 2026 FIDE Freestyle Chess World Championship, defeating American grandmaster Fabiano Caruana 2.5–1.5 in the four-game final held at Weissenhaus, Germany. This is the first Freestyle Chess World Championship officially recognised by FIDE, and Carlsen's 21st world title across all formats.

Key Points:

- **Tournament and Venue:** The 2026 FIDE Freestyle Chess World Championship was held at Weissenhaus, Germany, from February 13 to 15, 2026. It is the first edition of the Freestyle Chess World Championship to receive official FIDE recognition.

- **Final Result:** Magnus Carlsen (Norway) defeated Fabiano Caruana (USA) by a score of 2.5–1.5 in the four-game final. A draw in the fourth and final game was sufficient for Carlsen to clinch the title.

- **Dramatic Game Three:** The decisive moment came in game three, when Carlsen made a blunder (15…Bxh4) that left him in a nearly lost position. However, Caruana missed multiple winning continuations under time pressure, made critical errors on moves 31, 35 and 36, and ultimately lost the game — handing Carlsen a decisive match advantage.

- **Carlsen's 21st World Title:** With this win, Carlsen takes his career world title tally to 21 across formats — 5 Classical World Championships, 6 World Rapid Championships, 9 World Blitz Championships, and now the inaugural FIDE Freestyle Chess World Championship.

- **About Freestyle Chess (Fischer Random / Chess960):** Freestyle Chess, also known as Fischer Random or Chess960, features randomised starting positions for back-rank pieces. This eliminates reliance on memorised opening theory and places greater emphasis on creativity and over-the-board calculation.

- **Caruana's Near-Miss:** Fabiano Caruana held winning positions in three of the four final games but could convert none. Chess legend Judit Polgar noted that Caruana suffered a 'psychological crack,' unable to believe he had a winning position against Carlsen, ultimately contributing to his own defeat.

- **India's Arjun Erigaisi:** Indian grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi participated in the championship but finished sixth after losing 0–2 to Hans Niemann in the fifth-place play-off.

Tarique Rahman Sworn in as Bangladesh Prime Minister

In the News: Tarique Rahman was sworn in as the new Prime Minister of Bangladesh by President Mohammed Shahabuddin, days after his party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), secured a landslide victory in the country's first general elections since the 2024 student-led uprising that ousted former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Key Points:

- **Swearing-In Ceremony:** The oath of office was administered by President Mohammed Shahabuddin at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad (parliament building) in Dhaka, in a departure from the long-standing tradition of holding such ceremonies at Bangabhaban (the President's official residence). The ceremony was televised, with hundreds of people gathered outside the grounds.

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- **Parliament Sworn In:** New members of the Bangladesh Parliament were sworn in on the same day (February 17, 2026) morning by Chief Election Commissioner A.M.M. Nasir Uddin inside the parliament's oath room.
- **BNP's Election Victory:** The BNP and its allies won at least 209 seats out of 299 contested constituencies in the 350-seat parliament, securing more than a two-thirds majority. The Jamaat-e-Islami and its allies won 77 seats. Former PM Sheikh Hasina's Awami League was banned from participating in the elections.
- **July National Charter:** Rahman is tasked with implementing the July National Charter, a sweeping governance reform document containing 80-plus proposed reforms. Over 60% of the electorate voted in favour of the charter in a referendum held simultaneously with the general elections on February 12, 2026. Key reforms include term limits, a two-chamber parliament, and restrictions on unilateral constitutional amendments by the governing party.
- **Constitution Reform Commission:** As an outcome of the referendum, the entire parliament is set to function as a "Constitution Reform Commission" for 180 days. However, the BNP declined to take a second oath as members of the commission, stating that "no provision of the council is yet to be incorporated in the Constitution," reflecting unease about the process.
- **About Tarique Rahman:** Rahman is 60 years old and leads the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). He takes charge with a strong democratic mandate and the responsibility of steering Bangladesh through sweeping constitutional and governance reforms.

Iran's Strait of Hormuz Shutdown: A Drill or a Global Warning?
In the News: Iran temporarily restricted parts of the Strait of Hormuz during live-fire military drills conducted by the Revolutionary Guard, coinciding with escalating Iran-US tensions and renewed indirect nuclear negotiations in Geneva, reigniting global concerns over energy security and maritime chokepoint vulnerability.

Key Points:
- **The Incident:** Iran's Revolutionary Guard declared the Strait of Hormuz closed for several hours, conducting live-fire missile drills and surface firing exercises. Tehran described it as a routine safety and maritime precaution — marking the first time Iran publicly announced a temporary closure of the waterway in this context.
- **Strategic Significance of the Strait:** The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most critical maritime chokepoint, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. At its narrowest, it spans nearly 33 km, handles approximately 13 million barrels of oil per day (2025), and accounts for roughly 31% of global seaborne crude trade.
- **Dual Purpose — Safety and Signalling:** Analysts interpreted the drills as both operational and symbolic. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a stern warning that Iran would respond strongly to any aggression, signalling that military action against Iran could disrupt global energy flows.
- **Geneva Nuclear Talks:** The drills coincided with indirect Iran-US negotiations in Geneva, mediated by Oman. The US delegation was led by Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. While limited progress was reported, key differences remain over uranium enrichment levels and stockpile caps. Iran insists its nuclear programme is peaceful; the US seeks firm non-weaponisation guarantees. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi later expressed hope for a sustainable, negotiated solution.
- **Iran-US Tensions:** The backdrop includes recent US interception of an Iranian drone, maritime harassment reports, and expanded US naval deployments.

Why the Adani-Marseille Pact Could Be a Game-Changer for Global Shipping
In the News: The MoU signed on February 18, 2026, between APSEZ and the Port of Marseille Fos is being viewed as a transformative development in global shipping, as it operationalises a critical missing link in the IMEC corridor and offers a structured alternative to traditional Eurasian trade routes at a time of heightened geopolitical uncertainty.

Key Points:

- **Completing the IMEC Chain:** The pact effectively completes the end-to-end IMEC corridor — from Mundra and Hazira on India's western coast through West Asia to Marseille Fos as the European terminus — creating a seamless, coordinated multimodal trade spine between India and the EU.
- **Alternative to Suez and China-Dependent Routes:** With growing instability around the Red Sea–Suez Canal route (due to Houthi attacks and regional tensions) and geopolitical pressure to reduce dependence on China-dominated supply chains, the Adani–Marseille axis offers a secure, competitive, and politically diversified alternative for Eurasian trade flows.
- **Green Maritime Corridor:** The development of the Mundra–Marseille Fos Green Maritime Corridor signals a shift toward sustainable shipping, focusing on alternative fuels, shore power supply, and low-carbon bunkering — aligning with global decarbonisation goals in the maritime sector.
- **Digital and Smart Port Integration:** The partnership prioritises port digitalisation, smart port platforms, data interoperability, and cybersecurity — modernising trade infrastructure and enabling real-time cargo tracking and logistics management across the corridor.
- **India–EU FTA Multiplier Effect:** The India–EU Free Trade Agreement creates a significant surge in bilateral trade volumes. The Adani–Marseille pact provides the physical and logistical infrastructure needed to handle this growth efficiently, acting as a force multiplier for the FTA's economic benefits.
- **IMEC Ports Club as an Institutional Framework:** The proposed IMEC Ports Club will bring together key ports along the corridor, creating a governance mechanism for coordinated investment, policy advocacy, and operational standards — transforming IMEC from a vision into an institutionalised trade architecture.

Modi & Macron Launch H125 Project – India Enters Elite Helicopter League
In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron virtually inaugurated India's first private-sector helicopter manufacturing facility — the Final Assembly Line (FAL) of the Airbus H125 Light Utility Helicopter — at Vemagal Industrial Area in Kolar, Karnataka. The launch coincided with India and France elevating their bilateral ties to a Special Global Strategic Partnership.

Key Points:
- **The Facility:** The H125 Final Assembly Line is a joint venture between Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL) and Airbus Helicopters, located at Vemagal, Karnataka — making it India's first private-sector helicopter manufacturing plant. The facility will initially produce 10 H125 helicopters per year, with plans to scale up to meet a projected demand of 500 helicopters over the next 20 years.
- **First Made-in-India H125:** The first domestically assembled H125 helicopter is expected to fly by early 2027, marking a landmark achievement under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make-in-India missions.
- **About the H125 Helicopter:** The H125 is a globally renowned single-engine light utility helicopter, celebrated for its "hot and high" performance. It holds the distinction of being the only helicopter in history to have landed on the summit of Mount Everest — making it uniquely suited for India's high-altitude operational environments in the Himalayas.
- **C295 Aircraft — A Parallel Milestone:** This is the second major TASL–Airbus collaboration, following the C295 military transport aircraft Final Assembly Line in Vadodara, Gujarat. The first Made-in-India C295 is expected to roll out by September 2026. Of the 56 C295 aircraft ordered by the Indian Air Force, 16 have been delivered from Spain, while the remaining 40 are being manufactured in India with approximately 70% domestic component sourcing and 37 Indian suppliers onboard.
- **India–France Special Global Strategic Partnership:** India and France elevated their bilateral relationship to a Special Global Strategic Partnership, with 21 major outcomes announced across defence, technology, innovation, health, skilling, and critical minerals.

India & UK Launch Offshore Wind Taskforce Under Vision 2035

In the News: India and the United Kingdom launched the India-UK Offshore Wind Taskforce on February 18, 2026, during the Fourth India-UK Energy Dialogue. The initiative, operating under Vision 2035, aims to accelerate offshore wind development in India by combining UK expertise with India's large-scale renewable energy ambitions.

Key Points:
- **Launch & Leadership:** Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi launched the taskforce alongside UK Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy and British High Commissioner Lindy Cameron. Joshi described it as a "Trustforce" — focused on measurable milestones and outcomes aligned with Indian conditions, rather than symbolic partnerships.
- **Framework & Purpose:** The taskforce operates under Vision 2035 and the Fourth India-UK Energy Dialogue to provide strategic leadership for building India's offshore wind ecosystem. The UK contributes experience in scaling offshore wind and mature supply chains, while India offers market scale and rapidly growing clean energy demand.
- **Three Key Pillars:** The taskforce focuses on three priority areas — (1) Ecosystem planning and market design, including seabed leasing frameworks and revenue certainty mechanisms; (2) Infrastructure and supply chains, covering port modernisation, domestic manufacturing, and specialised marine vessels; and (3) Financing and risk mitigation through blended finance models and long-term institutional capital.
- **Identified Wind Zones & VGF Support:** Promising offshore wind zones have been identified off the coasts of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, backed by surveys from the National Institute of Wind Energy. To support early-stage projects, the government has approved a Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme worth ₹7,453 crore (approximately £710 million).
- **Link with Green Hydrogen Mission:** The taskforce aligns with India's National Green Hydrogen Mission. Offshore wind can supply high-quality renewable power to coastal green hydrogen clusters. India leads the Hydrogen Breakthrough Goal under the international Breakthrough Agenda, with green hydrogen prices falling to ₹279 per kg and green ammonia to ₹49.75 per kg.

India Joins 100+ Nations in Strong Stand Against Israel's West Bank Actions

In the News: India joined over 100 countries and global organisations in signing a joint statement issued at the United Nations, condemning Israel's "unilateral decisions and measures" aimed at expanding its presence in the West Bank. The statement, issued by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, strongly opposed any actions altering the status of occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

Key Points:
- **The Joint Statement:** The statement "strongly condemns unilateral Israeli decisions and measures" in the West Bank, terming them contrary to international law. It urges the immediate reversal of such actions and reiterates strong opposition to annexation. The statement was initially signed by 85 nations on February 17, with India joining later when the total number of signatories exceeded 100.
- **What the Statement Opposes:** The signatories collectively rejected any changes to the demographic composition of Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, measures altering the character and status of East Jerusalem, and steps that undermine ongoing peace efforts. The statement noted that such measures violate international law, undermine peace and stability, and jeopardise the prospect of a negotiated settlement.
- **Frameworks Reaffirmed:** The joint statement reaffirmed support for relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid Terms of Reference (1991 peace conference framework), the Arab Peace Initiative (2002), and the principle of "land for peace" — all of which support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.
- **Background — The West Bank Issue:** The West Bank has been under Israeli control since the 1967 Six-Day War. The international community largely considers Israeli settlements in the area illegal under international law, though Israel disputes this interpretation. The occupied territories include the West Bank and East Jerusalem, whose final status remains a core issue in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

- **India's Position on Israel-Palestine:** India has historically maintained a balanced and independent approach to the conflict. India supports a sovereign, independent, and viable State of Palestine, advocates peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine within secure and recognised borders, and backs the two-State solution as the only viable path to lasting peace. Notably, India was the first non-Arab country to recognise the State of Palestine in 1988.

India Joins Trump's Gaza Peace Board as Observer Amid Global Diplomacy Push
In the News: India participated as an observer in US President Donald Trump's inaugural Board of Peace meeting focused on Gaza reconstruction and stabilisation. Represented by Namgya C Khampa, Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington DC, India joined over 40 countries and the European Union at the event hosted at the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace .

Key Points:
- **Trump's Gaza Board of Peace:** US President Donald Trump convened the inaugural Board of Peace meeting to focus on Gaza reconstruction, mobilise an international stabilisation force, and promote a structured peace framework. The meeting brought together leaders from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, with over 40 nations and the European Union in attendance.
- **India's Observer Status:** India opted to attend as an observer rather than a formal board member, represented by Namgya C Khampa, Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington DC. Other observer nations included Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. India's observer role reflects its characteristically cautious and balanced diplomatic approach — engaging in dialogue without formal alignment on the Israel-Palestine issue.
- **India's Traditional Diplomatic Position on Gaza:** India has consistently supported a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, peaceful dialogue between parties, and the provision of humanitarian assistance to affected populations. Its participation as an observer is consistent with this long-standing independent foreign policy stance.
- **Pakistan's Participation:** Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif attended the meeting as a formal participating board member, in contrast to India's observer status. Trump praised Sharif and Pakistan's military leadership during the event, highlighting the complex and sensitive South Asian geopolitical dynamics playing out within this broader global diplomatic platform.
- **Global Participation and Key Agenda:** More than 40 countries and the European Union confirmed attendance at the Board of Peace meeting. The key agenda items included post-conflict reconstruction in Gaza, stabilisation and peacekeeping mechanisms, and international funding mobilisation for long-term regional stability.

Trump Announces 10% Global Tariff After Supreme Court Setback
In the News: US President Donald Trump signed an executive order imposing a 10% global tariff on imports from all countries, effective February 24, 2026 — hours after the US Supreme Court struck down his earlier emergency-based tariff regime in a 6-3 ruling. The move marks a sharp escalation in US trade policy and a significant constitutional confrontation between the executive and judicial branches.

Key Points:
- **Supreme Court Ruling:** In a 6-3 verdict, the US Supreme Court invalidated Trump's earlier sweeping tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), ruling that the IEEPA does not authorise the President to impose tariffs without Congressional approval.
- **Trump's Executive Order — 10% Global Tariff:** Reacting swiftly to the ruling, Trump signed an executive order imposing a 10% tariff on imports from all countries under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974. The tariff came into effect on February 24, 2026. Under Section 122, these tariffs are capped at 15% and limited to a maximum duration of 150 days (approximately 5 months), during which new investigations will determine future tariff levels.
- **Additional Trade Investigations:** Trump simultaneously announced the initiation of investigations under Section 301 of the US Trade Act to counter unfair foreign trading practices, and signalled potential future action under Section 232

(national security grounds). US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer described the Section 301 measures as "incredibly legally durable."

- **Tariff Revenue and Economic Impact:** The Congressional Budget Office had projected existing tariffs could raise around $3 trillion over a decade, though this would still be insufficient to eliminate long-term budget deficits. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent indicated that the shift to Section 122, Section 232, and Section 301 measures is expected to keep 2026 tariff revenues "virtually unchanged." Separately, tariff payments by mid-sized American firms — collectively employing around 48 million people — have tripled over the past year, prompting many to raise prices, curtail hiring, or accept reduced profit margins.
- **Refund Uncertainty:** The Supreme Court ruling has cast uncertainty over approximately $170 billion in tariff revenue collected under IEEPA over the past year, which may now be subject to refunds. Trump indicated the issue would need to be "litigated for the next two years," while Bessent noted it could be "dragged out for weeks, months, years."
- **Key Legal Provisions to Remember:** The US Constitution grants Congress — not the President — the power to levy taxes and tariffs. The IEEPA limits executive authority in trade matters and does not authorise unilateral tariff imposition. Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 allows temporary tariffs up to 15% for up to 150 days. Section 301 addresses unfair foreign trade practices, and Section 232 covers national security-based trade actions. Tariffs are paid by importers, not exporting governments, and costs are often passed on to consumers.

India Joins Pax Silica Alliance with the United States

In the News: India formally joined the Pax Silica coalition at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The signing ceremony marked a significant milestone in India-US strategic technology cooperation, with Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and senior US officials in attendance.

Key Points:
- **What is Pax Silica?** Pax Silica is a US-led strategic coalition of trusted, democratic nations aimed at securing the full "silicon stack" — from critical minerals and semiconductor fabrication to advanced AI systems and deployment infrastructure. It seeks to reduce overconcentration in global supply chains, prevent economic coercion, and ensure emerging technologies are governed by open, democratic societies.
- **India's Formal Entry:** India joined the Pax Silica declaration on Day 5 of the India AI Impact Summit 2026. US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor welcomed the move as a "fantastic partnership," and described it as both "strategic and essential." Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw called it highly significant for India's growing semiconductor and electronics ecosystem.
- **India's Semiconductor Ambitions:** Vaishnaw highlighted India's compounding growth since Independence and its rising semiconductor capabilities, noting that Indian engineers are today designing the world's most advanced two-nanometer chips. He added that the semiconductor industry will require around one million new skilled professionals — a major opportunity for India's youth. Ten semiconductor plants are already being established, with the first set to begin commercial production soon.
- **US Perspective:** Jacob Helberg, US Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, described the declaration as "not merely an agreement on paper, but a roadmap for a shared future," adding that economic security is national security. Ambassador Gor stated that Pax Silica is about ensuring free societies control the commanding heights of the global economy.
- **High-Level Fireside Chat:** Following the signing, a fireside chat featured MeitY Secretary S. Krishnan, Ambassador Sergio Gor, Micron Technology CEO Sanjay Mehrotra, and Tata Electronics CEO Randhir Thakur. Key themes included resilient AI-semiconductor supply chains, trusted partnerships, and India's coordinated push across AI, semiconductors, and critical minerals. Mehrotra called it a "win-win ecosystem to advance AI for good," while Thakur described it as "a timely and strategic step."

- **Current Member Nations:** The Pax Silica alliance currently includes the United States, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Israel, and Australia as founding members. The UAE, Qatar, and Greece joined last month, and India has now become the latest member.

Norway Breaks Winter Olympics Record! 17th Gold Seals Historic Milestone in Milan

In the News: At the 2026 Milan Cortina Winter Olympics, Norway created history by winning its 17th gold medal, breaking the record for the most gold medals won by a single nation at a Winter Games. The record-breaking gold came through Johannes Dale-Skjevdal, who delivered a flawless performance in the men's 15km biathlon mass start event at Anterselva, Italy, surpassing Norway's own previous record of 16 golds set at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

Key Points:

- **Record-Breaking Achievement:** Norway won its 17th gold medal at the Milan Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics, setting a new benchmark for the most gold medals won by any nation at a single Winter Games edition. Norway had previously set this record itself at the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics with 16 gold medals.
- **Johannes Dale-Skjevdal's Historic Performance:** The record-breaking gold was clinched by Johannes Dale-Skjevdal in the men's 15km biathlon mass start. He became the only biathlete to hit all 20 targets perfectly (20/20), finishing with a winning time of 39 minutes and 17.1 seconds. Dale-Skjevdal took the lead after the first standing shooting bout and maintained it through gusty winds and slow snow conditions. He described it as his first time shooting 20/20, calling it an unforgettable moment at his first Olympics.
- **Podium Finishers:** Silver was claimed by Norway's Sturla Holm Laegreid, who missed just one target and finished 10.5 seconds behind Dale-Skjevdal, earning his fifth medal of the 2026 Games. Bronze went to France's Quentin Fillon Maillet, who despite missing four targets used strong skiing to overtake Germany's Philipp Horn, finishing 25.6 seconds behind the winner. This became Fillon Maillet's ninth Olympic medal overall.
- **Norway's All-Time Winter Olympics Dominance:** Norway stands as the most successful nation in Winter Olympics history, leading the all-time medal table with 405 total medals — 148 Gold, 134 Silver, and 123 Bronze. Despite having a population of just over 5 million, Norway has consistently excelled in Nordic skiing, biathlon, and speed skating, driven by a strong winter sports culture and robust grassroots training programs.
- **Other Top Nations in All-Time Winter Olympics Medal Table:** The United States ranks second with 330 total medals (114 Gold, 121 Silver, 95 Bronze), finding success across disciplines like snowboarding, ice hockey, figure skating, and alpine skiing. Germany ranks third with 267 total medals (105 Gold, 97 Silver, 65 Bronze), having competed in only 13 Winter Games in its current form.
- **About the Milan Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics:** The 2026 Winter Olympics are being held in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. The biathlon events are staged at Anterselva, Italy. The men's 15km mass start was one of the final biathlon events of the Games, with the women's 12.5km mass start scheduled as the concluding biathlon competition.

Vasai Cathedral Wins UNESCO Award for Conservation

In the News: The conservation project of Our Lady of Grace Cathedral in Papdy village, Vasai, Maharashtra received the prestigious Award of Merit at the 2025 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation, announced in Bangkok. The 475-year-old Portuguese-era cathedral earned international recognition for its community-funded restoration through traditional craftsmanship and local participation.

Key Points:

- **About the Award:** The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation recognise outstanding conservation projects across the Asia-Pacific region. The 2025 edition marked the silver jubilee of the programme, with the jury assessing 90 entries from 16 countries and selecting winners based on technical achievement, sustainability, and understanding of place. The highest Award of Distinction went to projects in Japan and China, while other recognised sites were in Malaysia, Nepal, and Vanuatu.

- **About Our Lady of Grace Cathedral:** The Our Lady of Grace Cathedral, located in Papdy village, Vasai (formerly known as Bassein), Maharashtra, is a 475-year-old stone structure built during Portuguese colonial rule in the 16th century. It stands as a testament to the establishment and spread of Catholicism in Maharashtra. The structure was built without cement or bricks, relying on mud-based construction techniques typical of the era.
- **Historical Significance of Vasai:** Vasai, formerly known as Bassein, was a major Portuguese stronghold in the 16th century. Portuguese colonial architecture has significantly influenced the western coastal regions of India, and the cathedral is a prime example of this architectural legacy.
- **Need for Restoration:** Over centuries, exposure to monsoon weather and ad hoc repairs weakened the cathedral, particularly its roof and bell tower. The earlier inappropriate repairs had compromised the structural integrity of the heritage structure, necessitating a systematic conservation effort.
- **Community-Led Effort:** The entire restoration was financed through sustained donations from the local parish community, demonstrating exceptional stakeholder engagement. The UNESCO citation praised the "skilled use of traditional craftsmanship," especially the hand-carved renewal of liturgical elements, and highlighted the revival of the cathedral as a living place of worship and communal devotion.

Poland's Exit from the Ottawa Convention

In the News: Poland officially withdrew from the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Convention), concluding a six-month withdrawal process that began in August 2025. The withdrawal reverses Poland's earlier commitments after it had ratified the treaty in 2012 and completed the destruction of its stockpiles in 2016. Prime Minister Donald Tusk stated that Poland will be able to deploy anti-personnel mines along its eastern border within 48 hours should a threat emerge.

Key Points:
- **About the Ottawa Convention (1997):** The Ottawa Convention formally known as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty emerged from the Canadian-led Ottawa Process following the First Review Conference of the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), which failed to impose strict limits on anti-personnel mines. The treaty bans the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel mines due to their long-term devastating impact on civilian populations.
- **Types of Landmines and Legal Status:** Landmines are mainly of two types — anti-personnel mines and anti-vehicle (anti-tank) mines. While anti-personnel mines are prohibited under the Ottawa Convention, anti-tank mines are not banned and are regulated under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), 1980 — Amended Protocol II (1996).
- **Geopolitical Rationale for Poland's Withdrawal:** The withdrawal is driven by the need to secure Poland's eastern borders through the Eastern Shield, a fortification system on the borders with Russia (Kaliningrad enclave) and Belarus. The decision follows Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the resulting heightened security concerns among Eastern European nations.
- **Domestic Production Plans:** Poland intends to achieve self-sufficiency by renewing domestic manufacturing of both anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines in cooperation with Polish producers — resuming such production for the first time since the Cold War. Deputy Defence Minister Pawel Zalewski confirmed plans to potentially export anti-personnel mines to Ukraine as well. The Polish government stated that mines will remain in stockpiles and will only be deployed in the event of a "realistic threat of aggression" to minimize civilian risk.
- **Global Context:** India, Russia, and the United States are among nearly three dozen nations that have never acceded to the Ottawa Convention, highlighting that the treaty has always had significant gaps in global participation, particularly among major military powers.

What are Section 122 tariffs and how will they differ from Trump's earlier tariffs?

In the News: The US Supreme Court in a 6-3 ruling struck down President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977, finding that the President had overstepped his constitutional powers by bypassing Congress. Hours after the ruling, Trump announced replacement tariffs of 10% under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, which he subsequently raised to 15% — the maximum permissible limit under the provision — effective February 24, 2026.

Key Points:
- **Supreme Court Ruling Against IEEPA Tariffs:** The US Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that Trump did not have the authority to invoke the IEEPA — a national economic emergency law traditionally used in a sanctions capacity — to impose sweeping global tariffs on imports. This brought into question the status of the Liberation Day tariffs announced on April 2, 2025, which had imposed a baseline 10% rate on all trading partners along with country-specific "reciprocal" tariffs. The US had already collected more than $175 billion in tariffs under IEEPA before the ruling.
- **What is Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974?** Section 122 was enacted during the Nixon era and directs the President to take measures, including imposing a temporary import surcharge, when necessary to address "large and serious United States balance-of-payments deficits" or situations presenting "fundamental international payments problems." The provision has never been used before Trump's invocation, making these the first-ever Section 122 tariffs in US history.
- **Historical Background — Nixon's Precedent:** The origins of Section 122 trace back to 1971, when Nixon invoked the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917 (TWEA) to briefly impose a 10% tariff on all imports while the US struggled to resolve its balance-of-payments crisis amid the collapse of the Bretton Woods fixed exchange rate system. Section 122 was subsequently enacted as a successor instrument to address such situations. Trump had earlier cited Nixon's precedent as rationale for his IEEPA tariffs.
- **Key Features and Limitations of Section 122 Tariffs:** The tariff surcharge under Section 122 cannot exceed 15% and can only remain in place for a maximum of 150 days unless Congress approves an extension. Unlike other trade statutes, Section 122 does not require lengthy investigations, allowing Trump to continue announcing tariffs in rapid succession. However, after 150 days, the tariffs would face a Congressional wall and likely fresh legal challenges.
- **Legal Vulnerability of Section 122:** A Congressional Research Service report from April 2025 noted that "balance-of-payments deficits" under Section 122 did not specifically refer to trade deficits but focused on broader international payment measures including trade in services and capital flows. With the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1973 and the introduction of floating exchange rates, it could be argued that the balance-of-payments crisis as originally envisioned by Section 122 entirely ceased to exist as a concept, raising serious questions about the contemporary applicability of the law.
- **Exemptions Under Section 122 Tariffs:** The new tariffs exclude critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, energy products, some electronics, agricultural products including beef, automobiles and parts, aerospace products, goods subject to existing Section 232 tariffs, and imports under the US-Canada-Mexico Free Trade Agreement (USMCA).

OBITUARY

The 'Grandfather of the Internet' Is Gone – How David J. Farber Helped Build the Digital World

In the News: David J. Farber, widely known as the 'Grandfather of the Internet,' passed away on February 7, 2026, in Tokyo at the age of 91. A pioneering computer scientist, professor and federal policy adviser, Farber's experimental networking research and legendary mentorship helped lay the groundwork for the modern internet. His death was confirmed by the Internet Society and the Internet Hall of Fame.

Key Points:
- **Who Was David J. Farber:** Born on 17 April, 1934, in Jersey City, New Jersey, Farber graduated from the Stevens Institute of Technology with a B.E. degree in electrical engineering in 1956 and a M.S. degree in mathematics in 1961

and began his career at Bell Laboratories in the 1950s, where he was exposed to cutting-edge computing and telecommunications research.

- **Why Called 'Grandfather of the Internet':** Farber earned this title primarily through his mentorship. His doctoral students Jonathan Postel — who helped define Internet Protocol (IP) — and Paul Mockapetris — who designed the Domain Name System (DNS) — became foundational architects of the internet. Farber and Postel held weekly discussions in the early 1970s that shaped core networking rules.
- **Domain Name System (DNS):** DNS is the system that translates human-readable website names (like google.com) into numerical IP addresses that computers use to communicate. It was designed by Farber's student Paul Mockapetris and is a fundamental pillar of how the internet functions today.
- **Role in ARPANET and NSFNet:** Farber contributed to expanding ARPANET — the U.S. Department of Defense-funded research network that evolved into the internet. He played a key advisory role in the development of NSFNet (National Science Foundation Network), which connected university research centres across the USA and demonstrated the transformative potential of wide-area networking. He also helped conceive and organize the major American research networks CSNET,
- **'Interesting People' Mailing List:** Farber curated one of the internet's earliest and most influential mailing lists called 'Interesting People' (IP), personally moderating discussions on technology policy, civil liberties and digital communication. It became essential reading for technologists, policymakers and academics, and served as an early model for expert-driven information sharing.
- **Internet Hall of Fame and Internet Society:** Farber was inducted into the Internet Hall of Fame and served on the board of trustees of the Internet Society, helping shape its mission to promote an open, globally connected internet. He was also associated with the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), contributing to digital rights debates.

SCIENCE AND TECH

GalaxEye's AI-Powered OptoSAR Satellite 'Mission Drishti' to Transform Earth Data Analysis
In the News: Bengaluru-based space technology startup GalaxEye announced that its upcoming satellite, Mission Drishti, will feature NVIDIA Jetson Orin — a powerful compact AI computer — to process and interpret Earth observation data directly in space. The mission will also carry the world's first SyncFused OptoSAR architecture, combining Electro-Optical and Synthetic Aperture Radar sensors on a single satellite platform.

Key Points:
- **Mission Drishti Overview:** GalaxEye's Mission Drishti is an AI-enabled OptoSAR satellite designed to revolutionize Earth observation. CEO Suyash Singh described it as a defining milestone, building on the company's successful in-space demonstration in 2024.
- **NVIDIA Jetson Orin in Space:** Mission Drishti will carry the NVIDIA Jetson Orin module — a compact yet powerful AI computer — into orbit. It will run complex AI models, accelerate in-space data processing, reduce dependency on ground-based analysis, and deliver faster intelligence to customers.
- **World's First SyncFused OptoSAR Technology:** The satellite will feature GalaxEye's proprietary SyncFused OptoSAR architecture, which integrates Electro-Optical (EO) sensors — which capture high-resolution images during daylight and clear weather — with Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) sensors — which use radar pulses to image Earth in all weather conditions, including at night. This combination eliminates the traditional trade-off between image resolution and all-weather capability.
- **Key Application Areas:** The AI-enabled satellite will generate consistent, actionable intelligence for agriculture monitoring, disaster response and early warning systems, natural resource management, and infrastructure and environmental monitoring.

- **Orbital Data Centres (ODC):** Mission Drishti will also explore the feasibility of Orbital Data Centres, where multiple satellites operate as interconnected compute nodes, processing data collaboratively in orbit to improve scalability and operational efficiency. Insights from this mission are expected to shape future satellite constellation designs.

ENVIRONMENT

Ganga basin water decline

In the News: A study published in Earth's Future (American Geophysical Union journal) by researchers from IIT Gandhinagar reveals that annual streamflow in the Ganga Basin has declined by 17% since 1980, while the Indus Basin saw an 8% rise. The primary cause of the Ganga's decline is intensive groundwater pumping for irrigation, compounded by a 10% drop in rainfall and rising temperatures. The findings call for urgent, integrated water management across the region.

Key Points:

- **About the Study:** Published in Earth's Future, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Geophysical Union. Conducted by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Gandhinagar. It analysed streamflow changes across the Indus and Ganga basins from 1980 to 2021 using a high-resolution, physics-based hydrological model (ParFlow-CLM) run at ~5 km resolution over 42 years.
- **Key Finding – Contrasting Trends:** Indus Basin: Annual streamflow rose by 8% since 1980, driven mainly by increased precipitation from western disturbances and variable monsoon contributions. Ganga Basin: Annual streamflow fell sharply by 17% since 1980, due to declining rainfall, rising temperatures, and heavy groundwater extraction.
- **Indus Basin – River-wise Trends:** The main Indus River and its western tributaries — Jhelum and Chenab — recorded the strongest flow increases. However, the two eastern tributaries — Ravi and Sutlej — have seen significant flow declines despite the basin-wide upward trend.
- **Causes of Ganga Basin Decline:** Rainfall has declined by ~10%. Temperatures and atmospheric water demand have increased. Most critically, intensive groundwater pumping for irrigation is the dominant factor. Groundwater normally contributes 50–70% of annual river flow in parts of the Ganga Basin. Heavy pumping — especially during weak monsoon years — reduces this underground discharge into rivers. In some stretches of the Yamuna and upper Ganga, river-aquifer flow has even reversed, with rivers now losing water to depleted groundwater systems.
- **Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) Implications:** The 1960 Indus Waters Treaty allocates eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) to India and western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab) primarily to Pakistan. India suspended the IWT in April 2025 following the Pahalgam terror attack, and has fast-tracked hydropower project clearances on western rivers. IIT-G professor Vimal Mishra (co-author) noted that these hydrological trends necessitate a relook at water-sharing arrangements under the IWT, as climate change and human water use have altered the baseline assumptions of the treaty.

Highways That Help Honeybees? NHAI's 'BeeCorridors' Plan Could Change India's Green Future

In the News: The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) announced India's first-of-its-kind BeeCorridors initiative along National Highways. Under this eco-friendly plan, NHAI will develop pollinator-friendly corridors with flowering trees and plants, with nearly 60% of 40 lakh trees to be planted in 2026–27 designated as bee-friendly species — marking a landmark shift toward sustainable highway development and pollinator conservation.

Key Points:

- **The BeeCorridors Initiative:** NHAI's BeeCorridors plan marks a fundamental shift from ornamental roadside plantations to ecological plantations along National Highways. Instead of decorative plants, NHAI will focus on nectar-

and pollen-rich native species that actively support honeybees and other pollinators, ensuring a continuous food supply throughout the year.

- **Plantation Targets for 2026–27:** NHAI plans to plant approximately 40 lakh trees during 2026–27, with nearly 60% planted under the BeeCorridors initiative. At least three pollinator corridors will be developed during this period. Field offices across India will identify suitable National Highway stretches and vacant land parcels based on agro-climatic conditions.
- **Native Species to be Used:** The initiative will utilise a mix of trees, shrubs, herbs, and grasses. Key native species include Neem, Karanj, Mahua, Palash, Bottle Brush, Jamun, and Siris — chosen for their nectar and pollen richness and their suitability across different agro-climatic zones of India.
- **Scientific Planning — Staggered Flowering:** The plantation design ensures staggered flowering across different seasons, maintaining year-round nectar availability for pollinators. Clusters of flowering trees will be planted at intervals of 500 metres to 1 km, aligning with the average foraging distance of honeybees — making the corridors biologically functional rather than merely aesthetic.
- **Why Pollinator Conservation Matters:** Pollinators, especially honeybees, are critical to agriculture and horticulture. Nearly one-third of global food production depends on pollination. Increasing ecological stress and habitat loss have severely affected pollinator populations across India. The BeeCorridors initiative directly addresses this by transforming National Highway plantation zones into ecological support systems.

Kuno National Park Cheetah Population Rises to 38
In the News: Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced the birth of three new cheetah cubs at Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, raising India's total cheetah population to 38. The cubs were born to Gamini, a South African cheetah and a second-time mother, coinciding with the completion of three years since cheetahs were reintroduced to India under Project Cheetah.

Key Points:
- **The Latest Birth:** Gamini, a South African cheetah relocated under Project Cheetah, successfully delivered three cubs at Kuno National Park — her second successful litter — marking a significant milestone in India's cheetah conservation journey. The announcement was made by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on X (formerly Twitter).
- **Population Milestone:** With the three new additions, India's total cheetah population has risen to 38. The number of surviving Indian-born cheetah cubs now stands at 27, and this birth marks the ninth successful litter recorded on Indian soil since reintroduction began.
- **About Project Cheetah:** Launched in 2022–23, Project Cheetah marked the world's first inter-continental translocation of a large carnivore. A total of 20 cheetahs were brought from Namibia and South Africa to India. PM Narendra Modi personally released the first batch of eight cheetahs at Kuno National Park on 17 September 2022.
- **Three Years of Reintroduction:** The latest births coincide with the completion of three years since cheetahs from South Africa arrived in India, underscoring the programme's growing success and the species' adaptability to Indian ecological conditions.
- **Location — Kuno National Park:** Located in Madhya Pradesh, Kuno National Park was selected as the primary site for cheetah reintroduction due to its suitable grassland and scrub forest habitat, adequate prey base, and low human pressure relative to other candidate sites.

Kerala Declares Tidal Flooding a State-Specific Disaster
In the News: Kerala became the first state in India to officially declare tidal flooding a State-specific disaster, enabling victims to receive financial assistance under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). The decision was prompted by recurrent sea incursions causing loss of life, property, and livelihoods along the state's coastline

Key Points:

- **Historic Declaration:** Kerala is the first state in India to classify tidal flooding (coastal high-tide flooding/sea incursion) as a State-specific disaster, unlocking SDRF-based compensation and relief for affected coastal families.
- **What is Tidal Flooding?** It occurs when the Arabian Sea level temporarily rises above an identified threshold, inundating low-lying coastal areas. Unlike cyclone-induced storm surges, it happens twice daily and intensifies during full and new moon phases (spring tides). The situation worsens when high tides coincide with coastal storms, with seawater entering inland through rivers, backwaters, and canals.
- **Legal Basis:** Section 2(d) of the Disaster Management Act permits a state to classify a natural event as a disaster if it causes substantial damage to life, livelihood, and property. Kerala invoked this provision, arguing that coastal high-tide flooding exceeds normal limits in many areas.
- **Why Kerala is Uniquely Vulnerable:** Kerala's distinct topography sets it apart — parts of Alappuzha (Kuttanad region) lie below sea level, and Kochi is barely above sea level. Frequently affected areas include Vypin, Chellanam, Edakochi, Perumbadappu, and Kumbalanghi. Nine coastal districts are particularly at risk.
- **Scale of Impact:** At least 10% of Kerala's population is affected by high-tide flooding. Aggravating factors include excessive river siltation, reduced depth of lakes, and poor land-use patterns with structures built in floodplains. Unlike rainfall flooding, tidal flooding is a year-round hazard.
- **Other State-Specific Disasters in Kerala:** Apart from nationally notified disasters, Kerala has previously notified coastal erosion, lightning, strong winds, soil piping, heatwave/sunstroke/sunburn, human-wildlife conflict, and a shipwreck (MSE Elsa 3, which capsized on May 25, 2025, off the Kerala coast) as State-specific disasters.

IMPORTANT DAYS

International Childhood Cancer Day

In the News: International Childhood Cancer Day (ICCD) is observed globally on February 15 every year. In 2026, the day is marked under the theme "Demonstrating Impact: From Challenge to Change." The campaign, run by Childhood Cancer International (CCI), raises awareness about childhood cancer and advocates for equitable access to treatment worldwide. Every year, over 400,000 children under age 20 are diagnosed with cancer, and a child dies of cancer every 3 minutes globally

Key Points:
- **About ICCD:** A global collaborative campaign observed on February 15 annually, created in 2002 by Childhood Cancer International (CCI) — a network of 183 organizations in 94+ countries across 5 continents. It advocates for the best possible medical and psychosocial care for every child with cancer, regardless of race, nationality, or financial status.
- **2026 Theme:** "Demonstrating Impact: From Challenge to Change" — focused on showcasing real-world progress in childhood cancer care and pushing for systemic improvements.
- **Global Burden:** 400,000+ children & adolescents (below 20) are diagnosed with cancer every year. A child dies of cancer every 3 minutes. Cancer is a leading cause of death among children and adolescents globally.
- **WHO 2030 Target Goal:** The WHO Global Childhood Cancer Initiative aims to achieve at least 60% survival for all children diagnosed with cancer worldwide by 2030, roughly doubling the current global cure rate and saving approximately 1 million additional children's lives over the next decade.
- **CHILDCANCER Acronym (Warning Signs):** C – Continued unexplained weight loss | H – Headaches with early-morning vomiting | I – Increased swelling/pain in bones, joints, back, or legs | L – Lump/mass in neck, chest, armpits, belly, or pelvis | D – Excessive bruising, bleeding, or rash | C – Constant/persistent infections | A – Whitish colour behind the pupil | N – Persistent nausea/vomiting | C – Constant tiredness or paleness | E – Sudden eye/vision changes | R – Recurring fevers not due to flu.

SPORTS

India-Pakistan T20 Match Results

In the News: India defeated Pakistan by 61 runs in Match 27 of the ICC T20 World Cup 2026 at the R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo, Sri Lanka. India posted 175/7 and bowled Pakistan out for 114 in 18 overs to qualify for the Super 8 stage. This was the largest margin of victory ever recorded by India against Pakistan in T20 Internationals.

Key Points:

- **Match Details:** India vs Pakistan, Match 27, ICC T20 World Cup 2026. Venue: R. Premadasa Stadium, Colombo. Date: February 15, 2026 (Sunday). Toss: Pakistan won and elected to field first.
- **India's Innings (175/7):** Opener Abhishek Sharma was dismissed for a duck in the 1st over. Ishan Kishan (wk) rescued the innings with a brilliant 77 off 40 balls. Captain Suryakumar Yadav contributed 32, and Shivam Dube added 27. India posted 175/7 in 20 overs.
- **Pakistan's Collapse (114 all out):** Chasing 176, Pakistan slumped to 13/3 within 2 overs. Hardik Pandya dismissed Sahibzada Farhan for a duck in the 1st over. Jasprit Bumrah then removed Saim Ayub (6) and captain Salman Agha (4) in the 2nd over. Pakistan were eventually bowled out for 114 in 18 overs.
- **Top Performers:** India — Ishan Kishan: 77 off 40 balls; Suryakumar Yadav: 32; Shivam Dube: 27; Jasprit Bumrah & Hardik Pandya (key wickets). Pakistan — Usman Khan: 44 (top scorer); Shaheen Afridi: 23* ; Saim Ayub: 3 wickets (incl. Tilak Varma 25 & Hardik Pandya 0 on successive balls).
- **Historical Records:** Largest-ever victory margin for India vs Pakistan in T20Is. Pakistan's 114 is their third-lowest total against India in T20s. India's overall World Cup record vs Pakistan: 8–1 (Pakistan's only win came once). India have won all 8 matches against Pakistan in ODI World Cups.
- **Group A Standings:** India qualified for the Super 8 with their third win in three games. Pakistan dropped to 3rd place in Group A, behind Team USA, due to poor Net Run Rate. Pakistan must beat Namibia (Wednesday) to stay in Super 8 contention.

Smriti Mandhana Wins BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025

In the News: Indian cricket star Smriti Mandhana was named the BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025 at a grand ceremony held at the Taj Palace Hotel in New Delhi, recognizing her outstanding contribution to India's historic ICC Women's World Cup 2025 triumph.

Key Points:

- **Main Award:** Smriti Mandhana (29), India's vice-captain, won the BBC Indian Sportswoman of the Year 2025. She scored 434 runs across the 2025 ICC Women's World Cup tournament, playing a pivotal role in India's historic win. Other nominees included Harmanpreet Kaur, Divya Deshmukh, Suruchi Singh, and Jyothi Yarraji.
- **Emerging Player of the Year:** Chess prodigy Divya Deshmukh won this award after becoming FIDE Women's World Cup champion at just 20 years of age. She is only the fourth Indian woman to become a chess grandmaster.
- **Para Sportswoman of the Year:** Preethi Pal was honoured for winning two medals at the 2025 World Para Athletics Championships in New Delhi and two bronze medals at the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games. The BBC ceremony also honoured Anjali Bhagwat with a Lifetime Achievement Award, which the document does not mention.
- **Mandhana's Key Achievements:** She holds the record for the second-highest centuries in Women's ODIs, is third in total runs among current women cricketers, and clocked the fastest 50-over international century (50 balls) by any Indian — men or women — breaking Virat Kohli's record. She has also won two Women's Premier League titles with Royal Challengers Bengaluru and shares the record of 17 international centuries across formats with Australia's Meg Lanning.

- **BBC Star Performers of the Year 2025:** India Women's Cricket Team (World Cup), India Women's Cricket Team for the Blind (World Cup), India Women's Kabaddi Team (World Cup), and Ekta Bhyan, Deepthi Jeevanji & Preethi Pal (World Para Athletics Championship).
- **BBC Changemakers of the Year 2025:** India Women's Ice Hockey Team, Rajbir Kaur, Savita Punia, and Paani Devi — recognised for breaking barriers and contributing to grassroots sport.

Harmanpreet Kaur Creates History: Becomes Most-Capped Player in Women's Cricket

In the News: India captain Harmanpreet Kaur created history by becoming the most-capped player in women's international cricket, surpassing New Zealand legend Suzie Bates during the second T20I against Australia in Canberra. With her 356th international appearance, she set a new benchmark in women's cricket globally.

Key Points:

- **Historic Milestone:** Harmanpreet Kaur played her 356th international match during the second T20I against Australia in Canberra on February 20, 2026, surpassing Suzie Bates (355 matches) to become the most-capped women's international cricketer of all time.
- **Top 5 Most-Capped Women Cricketers:** Harmanpreet Kaur (India) – 356, Suzie Bates (New Zealand) – 355, Ellyse Perry (Australia) – 349, Mithali Raj (India) – 333, and Charlotte Edwards (England) – 309. Notably, Bates and Perry are still active, so the rankings may change over time.
- **Career Overview:** The Punjab-born cricketer made her international debut in March 2009 at the age of 19. She has since played 6 Tests, 161 ODIs, and 189 T20Is, scoring 200, 4409, and 3784 runs respectively, with 8 centuries and 38 fifties across formats.
- **World Cup Glory:** Harmanpreet led India to their maiden ICC Women's ODI World Cup title in 2025, defeating South Africa in the final — a historic turning point for Indian women's cricket. She also oversaw a 3-2 T20I series win in England.
- **Match Context:** Despite the historic occasion, India lost the second T20I to Australia. Georgia Voll (88) and Beth Mooney (46) put on a 128-run opening stand, powering Australia to 163/5. India were bowled out for 144/9 in reply, with Harmanpreet top-scoring with 36. The series is now level 1-1, with the decider scheduled in Adelaide on February 22, 2026.