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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Rashtrapati Bhavan Hosts 'Purple Fest'

In the News: Rashtrapati Bhavan hosted 'Purple Fest', a day-long celebration organised by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to honour the talent, achievements, and aspirations of Divyangjan (persons with disabilities). Over 8,000 Divyangjan visited the Amrit Udyan at the Presidential Estate, which was opened exclusively for them. President Droupadi Murmu attended the evening cultural programme and emphasised that Divyangjan are equal partners in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Key Points:

- **Purple Fest:** Rashtrapati Bhavan hosted the Purple Fest on 13 March 2026, a day-long event organised by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to celebrate the talent, achievements, and aspirations of Divyangjan (persons with disabilities).
- **Participation:** Over 8,000 Divyangjan visited the Amrit Udyan at the Presidential Estate, which was exclusively opened for them. Visitors participated in fun games, learning activities, and interactive stalls set up by organisations working for the welfare and empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- **President's Address:** President Murmu said that the true character of a society is reflected in how it treats its marginalised sections. She noted that Indian civilisation is rooted in sensitivity, inclusivity, and harmony, and that the Constitution provides a framework for social justice, equality, and dignity for all citizens.
- **Viksit Bharat and Divyangjan:** President Murmu stated that India is moving forward with the collective goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047, and that Divyangjan are equal partners in this journey. She called on every member of society to provide Divyangjan with equal opportunities and dignity.
- **Constitutional Provisions:** The President highlighted that the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) recognise the rights of persons with disabilities to education, work, and public assistance, underscoring India's constitutional commitment to their empowerment.
- **About Divyangjan:** The term 'Divyangjan' (meaning 'persons with divine body') was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 to replace earlier terminology. It reflects a positive and empowering framing of disability. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, is the primary legislation governing the rights and welfare of Divyangjan in India.
- **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment:** The Ministry is the nodal ministry for the welfare, empowerment, and social justice for Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes, persons with disabilities (Divyangjan), senior citizens, and other marginalised communities. Key disability-related schemes include ADIP (Assistive Devices), Unique Disability ID (UDID), and Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan).

HALEU- The fuel for Indian reactors

In the News: A January 2026 study published in Current Science by scientists at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) concluded that HALEU-Thorium (HALEU-Th) fuel is 'unsuitable' for India's current fleet of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) and 'undesirable' for India's three-stage nuclear programme. The study triggered a sharp debate among India's leading nuclear scientists and international experts, with former DAE Chairman Anil Kakodkar and MIT professor Koroush Shirvan challenging the conclusions, while AEC member Ravi Grover defended them. The controversy is linked to India's SHANTI Act 2025, which opened the nuclear sector to private and foreign participation, and an agreement between NTPC and the US-based Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE) to explore use of ANEEL fuel in India.

Key Points:

- **What is HALEU-Th:** HALEU-Th is a nuclear fuel mix combining High Assay Low Enriched Uranium (enriched to 5–20% U-235) with Thorium. The commercial version, ANEEL (Advanced Nuclear Energy for Enriched Life), is developed by the US-based company Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE), led by Indian-origin entrepreneur Mehul Shah.
- **How It Works:** U-235 in HALEU acts as the driver to initiate and maintain the nuclear chain reaction. Thorium-232 (not fissile itself) absorbs neutrons and converts into fissile U-233, which then undergoes fission. This process allows Thorium to be used in existing PHWRs.



- **Uranium Enrichment Types:** LEU (Low Enriched Uranium): below 5% U-235 — used in most global reactors. HALEU: 5%–20% U-235 — used in ANEEL. HEU (Highly Enriched Uranium): above 20% — weapons-grade; restricted by non-proliferation agreements. No country can enrich beyond 20% for energy production.
- **BARC Study Findings:** The BARC simulation found HALEU-Th yields the highest burn-up of 50 GWd/t and produces only 14% of the spent fuel of current reactors. However, it also found that HALEU-Th reduces shutdown rod effectiveness by ~26%, requiring significant reactor design changes. BARC concluded it is 'far from a drop-in option' for current PHWRs.
- **Critics of HALEU-Th:** AEC member and former BARC scientist Ravi Grover defended the study, saying HALEU is commercially limited and expensive, and that India already has a well-planned three-stage programme for using thorium via fast breeder reactors. Analyst R. Srikanth called HALEU-Th a 'distraction' that replaces uranium import dependence with HALEU dependence.
- **India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme:** Stage 1: PHWRs using natural uranium; Stage 2: Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) using plutonium (India's first 500 MWe FBR at Kalpakkam is being commissioned); Stage 3: Advanced Heavy Water Reactors using plutonium + thorium, freeing India from uranium imports. India has the world's largest thorium reserves.
- **SHANTI Act 2025 & CCTE Agreement:** The SHANTI Act 2025 opened India's nuclear power sector to foreign and private participation. CCTE subsequently entered an agreement with NTPC to explore using ANEEL fuel in Indian reactors. In August 2025, CCTE reported high burn-up results at the Idaho National Laboratory, US.

India's first judicial approval of passive euthanasia

In the News: In a landmark ruling in *Harish Rana v. Union of India & Ors.* (2026), the Supreme Court of India permitted passive euthanasia by allowing the withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment for Harish Rana, a 32-year-old man who had been in a Permanent Vegetative State (PVS) for over 13 years following a fall from a building in 2013. This marks the first court-approved implementation of passive euthanasia in India, operationalising the right to die with dignity recognised under Article 21 in the *Common Cause v. Union of India* (2018) judgment.

Key Points:

- **The Case:** Harish Rana was 19 when he fell from a 4th-floor building in Chandigarh in August 2013, suffering catastrophic brain injuries and 100% quadriplegia. He was sustained solely through CANH via PEG tubes for 13+ years with no sign of improvement. After the Delhi High Court dismissed his father's plea in 2024, the family approached the Supreme Court.
- **SC's Ruling:** The Supreme Court accepted the unanimous recommendations of medical boards and family members and permitted passive euthanasia — withdrawal of life support. It directed AIIMS, Delhi, to admit Harish Rana to its palliative care department and formulate a robust, palliative, and end-of-life care plan.
- **Waiver of 30-Day Period:** To prevent unnecessary suffering, the SC waived the standard 30-day reconsideration period, allowing immediate implementation of the medical boards' decision to withdraw treatment.
- **About Euthanasia:** Euthanasia (from Greek: 'eu' = good + 'thanatos' = death) means mercy killing — ending a life to relieve unbearable suffering from incurable illness, irreversible coma, or persistent vegetative state. It is classified as: Active (deliberate act — e.g., lethal injection) vs Passive (withholding/withdrawing life support); and Voluntary (with patient consent), Non-Voluntary (patient incompetent — e.g., coma), or Involuntary (without consent — illegal).
- **Legal Framework in India:** Active euthanasia is prohibited under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023 under Sections 100 (culpable homicide) and 101 (murder). Passive euthanasia was legalized by the SC in *Common Cause v. UoI* (2018) as an extension of the right to die with dignity under Article 21. The 241st Law Commission Report clarified that a competent patient's refusal of life-sustaining treatment is valid and doctors cannot be charged with abetment.
- **Living Will / Advance Medical Directive:** Defined in *Common Cause* (2018): a written document allowing a patient to give explicit instructions in advance about medical treatment when terminally ill or unable to consent — including authorising family to switch off life support if declared beyond medical help.
- **Two-Stage Medical Review Process:** Per 2018 guidelines (modified 2023): Primary Medical Board — treating physician + 2 independent doctors (min. 5 years experience); Secondary Medical Board — 3 independent doctors from district panel. Both boards must give opinions within 48 hours; their decision must be communicated to the Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) with family consent.
- **Landmark Judgments Leading to This Case:** *Maruti Dubal v. Maharashtra* (1987) — Bombay HC: right to die inherent in Article 21. *Gian Kaur v. Punjab* (1996) — SC reversed, held no right to die. *Aruna Shanbaug v. UoI* (2011) — SC

permitted passive euthanasia under safeguards. *Common Cause v. UoI* (2018) — SC recognised right to die with dignity, validated living wills. *Harish Rana v. UoI* (2026) — First actual court-approved implementation.

Supreme Court Tightens Rules as UPSC Changes DGP Appointment Process

In the News: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has revised its rules for appointing State Directors General of Police (DGP) following fresh directions from the Supreme Court of India, after multiple states were found violating earlier guidelines by delaying empanelment proposals and making legally invalid acting DGP appointments.

Key Points:

- **Background — Prakash Singh Case:** The framework for DGP appointments originates from the Prakash Singh police reforms case, in which the Supreme Court established guidelines to ensure stability and independence in police leadership, free from political interference. The current developments are a direct enforcement of those long-standing directions.
- **UPSC New Rule:** Under the revised system, state governments must obtain Supreme Court permission if they delay sending the list of eligible DGP-rank officers to the UPSC for empanelment. Without such approval, the UPSC cannot proceed with the empanelment process, closing the earlier loophole that allowed states to submit proposals late without consequence.
- **Empanelment Process:** Upon receiving the state's list of eligible senior DGP-rank officers, the UPSC prepares a panel of three names, from which the state government must select one — ensuring transparency and preventing political influence in the appointment of the head of the state police force.
- **No Concept of Acting DGP:** The Supreme Court strongly reaffirmed that appointing an acting DGP has no legal validity under the established police reform framework. Despite this, several states had been routinely appointing temporary or acting DGPs, which the Court stated directly undermines the police reform structure.
- **Why UPSC Sought Legal Opinion:** Due to repeated delays by states in submitting empanelment proposals, the UPSC approached the Attorney General of India to determine whether it could proceed with empanelment despite such irregularities.
- **Attorney General's Opinion:** The Attorney General concluded that the delays by state governments were excessive and legally unjustified, and that the UPSC has no provision to condone such delays or proceed with empanelment as if no violation had occurred — directly leading to the new rule requiring Supreme Court approval for all delayed submissions.

India's Defence Forces Vision 2047

In the News: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh released "Defence Forces Vision 2047: A Roadmap for a Future-Ready Indian Military" in New Delhi, a long-term strategic document prepared by the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, outlining India's plan to transform its armed forces into a modern, integrated and technology-driven military by the centenary of Independence.

Key Points:

- **Objective:** The document envisions transforming the Indian military into an integrated, multi-domain and agile force capable of deterring adversaries, responding across the full spectrum of conflict, and protecting India's expanding strategic interests — aligned with India's broader goal of becoming *Viksit Bharat* by 2047.
- **Jointness and Integration:** The vision emphasises greater tri-service coordination among the Army, Navy and Air Force to enable unified planning and execution of operations across all domains, addressing a long-standing structural gap in India's defence architecture.
- **Military Modernisation:** The document prioritises upgrading existing platforms, inducting cutting-edge weapon systems, and adopting emerging technologies to strengthen combat capabilities under a structured Capability Development Roadmap.
- **Self-Reliance in Defence (Aatmanirbharta):** The vision stresses promoting indigenous defence production, innovation and R&D, and revamping the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) to reduce import dependence and nurture the domestic defence ecosystem.
- **Multi-Domain Warfare Capability:** The document prepares the military to operate effectively and simultaneously across land, sea, air, cyber and space domains, reflecting the evolving nature of modern warfare.



- **New Strategic Institutions:** The vision proposes creation of a Drone Force, Data Force, Defence Geo-Spatial Agency, and a Cognitive Warfare Action Force, along with dedicated Space and Cyber Commands to address emerging operational threats.
- **Mission Sudarshan Chakra:** The plan calls for expanding ballistic missile defence and air defence systems under this mission to protect economic assets, strategic infrastructure and civilian installations against multi-domain threats.

Project Great Indian Bustard (GIB)

In the News: The Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment strengthening conservation of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB), ordering revised safeguards against power line collisions while balancing India's renewable energy expansion goals under the Green Energy Corridor (GEC) project.

Key Points:

- **About the Great Indian Bustard (GIB):** The GIB is a critically endangered bird species, also known as *Godawan*, *Hoom*, and *Gaganbher*. It is the state bird of Rajasthan, primarily found in the grasslands of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Its poor frontal vision and heavy body make it highly vulnerable to collisions with overhead power lines.
- **Background of the Case:** A retired bureaucrat and environmentalist petitioned the Supreme Court seeking urgent GIB protection, flagging fatal collisions with renewable energy transmission lines in Rajasthan and Gujarat, triggering a series of judicial interventions from 2021 to 2025.
- **2021 Supreme Court Order:** The Court imposed a blanket ban on new overhead power lines across ~99,000 sq km of GIB habitat, ordered mandatory bird diverters, and directed an assessment of undergrounding high-voltage lines.
- **March 2024 Modification:** The blanket ban was partially withdrawn after concerns raised by the Ministry of Power, MNRE, and MoEFCC over technical feasibility, and an expert committee of wildlife and power-sector specialists was constituted to recommend a more calibrated approach.
- **December 2025 Final Judgment:** Based on expert committee recommendations, the Court introduced targeted safeguards — expanding GIB priority conservation areas in Rajasthan from 13,163 sq km to 14,013 sq km and in Gujarat from 500 sq km to 740 sq km, with key protected sites including Desert National Park, Pokhran Field Firing Range, and Sanu–Mokla–Parewar.
- **Dedicated Powerline Corridors:** New corridors up to 5 km wide placed ≥5 km south of Desert National Park in Rajasthan, and corridors of 1–2 km width in Gujarat's coastal Kutch, were approved to carry rerouted overhead lines from wind and solar projects.
- **Impact on Green Energy Corridor (GEC):** The verdict directly reshapes India's GEC Phase I and II projects, with over 9 GW of solar capacity in Rajasthan and Gujarat affected. The ruling signals that India's renewable energy transmission backbone must now be planned around immutable conservation boundaries, raising the risk of stranded renewable assets in desert regions.

Fiscal Health Index 2026: Odisha Tops Again, Check Top 10 Best Performing States in India

In the News: NITI Aayog released the **Fiscal Health Index (FHI) 2026** on March 12, 2026, evaluating fiscal performance of Indian states for **FY 2023-24**. Odisha topped the rankings for the second consecutive year with an FHI score of 73.1. Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Kerala ranked at the bottom under the "Aspirational" category.

Key Points:

- **About FHI 2026:** NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index 2026 evaluates 18 major Indian states and 10 northeastern/Himalayan states across five pillars — Quality of Expenditure, Revenue Mobilisation, Fiscal Prudence, Debt Index, and Debt Sustainability. It assesses fiscal trends for FY 2023-24. A higher score indicates better fiscal management.
- **Odisha Tops Again (Achiever):** Odisha retained the #1 position with an overall score of 73.1. Its standout sub-scores: Debt Index (95.8) and Revenue Mobilisation (80.3). Success attributed to prudent fiscal management, stable revenues, and effective deficit control.
- **Top 10 States (Major States):** Odisha (73.1) → Goa (54.7) → Jharkhand (50.5) → Gujarat (49.9) → Maharashtra (45.0) → Chhattisgarh (44.3) → Telangana (44.3) → Uttar Pradesh (41.9) → Karnataka (41.7) → Madhya Pradesh (37.8).
- **Notable Risers:** Goa and Jharkhand moved up into Top 3 (previously "Front Runners" category). Haryana jumped from rank 14 to rank 11, reflecting disciplined expenditure management. Bihar (rank 12) showed marginal recovery through improved revenue surplus and expenditure quality.

- **Notable Fallers:** Chhattisgarh, which was ranked 2nd as an "Achiever" last year, slipped to 6th in the "Front Runners" category due to weaker fiscal conditions.
- **Stable Performers:** Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana showed stable and moderate fiscal strength, driven by resilient own-revenue bases and prudent debt levels.
- **Bottom States (Aspirational):** Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Kerala ranked at the bottom due to widening sustained deficits, slow revenue growth, and ongoing financial strain.
- **Northeastern & Himalayan States:** Arunachal Pradesh led this special category (driven by high Quality of Expenditure score). Uttarakhand ranked second (strong Revenue Mobilisation). Nagaland, Manipur, and Himachal Pradesh were among the weaker performers due to limited administrative capacity and fragmented public financial management.

Asia's Largest Tulip Garden Inaugurated By in Srinagar

In the News: Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah inaugurated the Tulip Show-2026 at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden in Srinagar — Asia's largest tulip garden. The inauguration marked the official start of the tourism season in the Kashmir Valley, with nearly 18 lakh tulips of over 70 varieties in full bloom.

Key Points:

- **About the Garden:** The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden is located at the foothills of the Zabarwan Mountain Range, overlooking Dal Lake in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. It is recognised as Asia's largest tulip garden. The garden was established in 2007 and has since become one of Kashmir's premier tourist attractions.
- **Inauguration of Tulip Show-2026:** J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah inaugurated the Tulip Show-2026 on March 17, 2026, and took a tour of the garden. He appealed to tourists from across India and around the world to visit J&K during the spring season to experience its natural beauty.
- **Flowers Planted This Year:** Around 18 lakh (1.8 million) tulips of over 70 varieties have been planted. Additionally, nearly 1 lakh other bulbous flowers — including daffodils, hyacinths, and narcissus — have also been cultivated, adding further vibrancy to the valley's spring landscape.
- **Why Tulips Thrive in Kashmir — Climatic Reasons:** Tulips are temperate flowers that grow from bulbs and require a prolonged cold period (vernalisation) before they break dormancy and bloom. Kashmir's naturally cold winters followed by cool, mild springs provide ideal conditions. Unlike the Indian plains where temperatures rise sharply post-winter, Kashmir's longer, cooler spring allows tulips to develop and bloom naturally — without artificial chilling, which is required in most other parts of India.
- **Annual Tulip Festival:** Every year during the bloom season, Kashmir celebrates the Tulip Festival, attracting thousands of domestic and international tourists. The festival showcases tulips against the scenic backdrop of the Zabarwan Mountains and Dal Lake, making it a unique and globally recognised floral event.

Government Withdraws Jan Vishwas Amendment Bill 2025

In the News: The Union Government withdrew the **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025** from the **Lok Sabha**. The withdrawal was moved by Union Commerce Minister **Piyush Goyal** and approved by the House via a voice vote. The bill will be revised incorporating recommendations of a **Select Committee** before being reintroduced in Parliament.

Key Points:

- **About the Bill:** The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025 sought to amend various laws to decriminalise minor offences and rationalise penalties. Its core objective is to replace imprisonment provisions with monetary penalties in certain cases, reducing the burden on the judicial system and promoting ease of doing business.
- **Reason for Withdrawal:** The bill was examined by a Select Committee, which suggested modifications to improve its provisions. To incorporate these recommendations, the government withdrew the bill with the approval of the Lok Sabha through a voice vote. This is a standard procedural step that allows the government to rework and reintroduce the bill in a refined form.
- **Who Moved the Withdrawal:** Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal moved the motion for withdrawal of the bill in the Lok Sabha.
- **Legislative Process — Bill Withdrawal in India:** Under the Indian parliamentary system, a pending bill can be withdrawn by the government with the permission of the House. After withdrawal, the revised version incorporating



committee suggestions can be reintroduced in Parliament at a later date. This is not a lapse of the bill but a deliberate procedural step for refinement.

- **Role of Select Committees:** A Select Committee is a parliamentary committee formed to examine a specific bill in detail. It studies provisions clause by clause, hears expert testimony, and recommends amendments. Its suggestions are not binding but carry significant legislative weight. Here, the Select Committee's recommendations prompted the government to revise the bill before re-enactment.
- **Purpose — Decriminalisation & Trust-Based Governance:** The bill is part of the government's broader initiative to shift from a punitive enforcement model to a trust-based governance framework. Decriminalising minor offences reduces unnecessary litigation, lowers compliance burden on businesses and citizens, and improves India's ease of doing business ranking.

No Age Limit on Maternity Leave for Adoptive Mothers Anymore: Supreme Court Verdict

Why in News: On 17 March 2026, the Supreme Court of India held that adoptive mothers cannot be denied maternity leave merely because the adopted child is older than three months. In *Hamsaanandini Nanduri v. Union of India*, a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan held that adoptive mothers are entitled to 12 weeks of maternity benefit irrespective of the child's age at adoption. The Court said the earlier age-based restriction created an artificial distinction, made the benefit illusory in practice, and violated Articles 14 and 21. The judgment is significant because it broadens the legal understanding of motherhood, childcare, and social security in Indian labour law.

Key Pointers:

- The case was *Hamsaanandini Nanduri v. Union of India*, and the Supreme Court judgment was uploaded on 17 March 2026.
- The Court examined Section 60(4) of the Code of Social Security, 2020, which had restricted maternity benefit for an adoptive mother to cases where the adopted child was below three months of age.
- The Supreme Court held that an adoptive mother is entitled to 12 weeks of maternity benefit from the date the child is handed over to her, regardless of the child's age.
- The Bench said the three-month cut-off created an artificial distinction between adoptive mothers even though mothers adopting older children are similarly placed in terms of caregiving responsibilities.
- The Court found that the restriction had no rational nexus with the object of the law and violated Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.
- The Court also urged the Union Government to consider recognising paternity leave as a social security benefit, indicating a broader move toward gender-sensitive caregiving law.

Maharashtra Assembly Passed the Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026

Why in News: The Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Bill, 2026 was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 16 March 2026 and was then cleared by the Legislative Council on 18 March 2026. The State Government said the Bill seeks to prohibit unlawful religious conversions carried out through force, coercion, allurement, misrepresentation, or other fraudulent means. The Bill triggered sharp political debate, with supporters presenting it as a measure against forced conversion and critics calling it vulnerable to misuse and constitutionally problematic. Thus, the issue has become important both politically and legally.

Key Pointers:

- The Bill defines unlawful conversion as conversion from one religion to another through allurement, coercion, deceit, force, misrepresentation, threat, undue influence, or other fraudulent means.
- It gives a broad meaning to allurement, including gifts, material benefits, employment, free education through religious bodies, promise of marriage, better lifestyle, divine healing, and even glorification of one religion over another in certain contexts.
- The Bill requires a person intending to convert, or an institution organising a conversion ceremony, to give a 60-day prior notice to the District Magistrate or another competent authority.
- A marriage undertaken solely for unlawful religious conversion may be declared null and void by a competent court.
- The proposed law makes offences cognisable and non-bailable and places the burden of proving that the conversion was voluntary and lawful on the person causing or aiding it.

- The Bill prescribes imprisonment that may extend to 7 years and a fine of ₹1 lakh for unlawful conversion, with higher punishment in aggravated cases and for repeat offenders.

Gujarat Receives UCC Draft Report from Justice Ranjana Desai Committee

Why in News: The Gujarat Government received the final report of the high-level committee set up to prepare a framework for a Uniform Civil Code in the State. The report was handed over in Gandhinagar by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, former judge of the Supreme Court, to Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel. Officials said the report stresses equal rights, protection of women, and sensitivity to Gujarat's geographical and cultural diversity. The submission is significant because Gujarat may become the second state after Uttarakhand to move toward implementing a Uniform Civil Code.

Key Pointers:

- The committee was headed by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, a former judge of the Supreme Court of India.
- The committee submitted three volumes of the draft or final report to the Chief Minister.
- The report suggests a common legal framework for all religions and communities in matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption.
- Officials said the committee prepared the report after a detailed study and district visits to collect public opinion.
- Government sources indicated that Gujarat was preparing to move a draft UCC Bill in the Assembly soon after receiving the report.
- If enacted, Gujarat would become only the second state after Uttarakhand to implement a Uniform Civil Code.

India Metro Network Becomes World's 3rd Largest Metro Network

Why in News: India has now become the world's third-largest operational metro network. The operational network has crossed 1,000 km, reflecting a major rise in urban transport capacity over the last decade. The expansion has been presented as part of India's wider push for modern, sustainable, and integrated urban mobility.

Key Pointers:

- India's operational metro network expanded from 248 km in 2014 to about 1,095 km in 2025.
- Metro services expanded from 5 cities in 2014 to 26 cities in 2025.
- The official note states that India is now the third-largest operational metro network in the world.
- The figure of 1,095 km includes about 55 km of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS, reflecting growing integration of metro and regional rapid transit systems.
- Since 2014, 38 metro rail projects covering about 1,051 km have been sanctioned at an estimated cost of ₹3.44 lakh crore.
- The annual metro budget rose from ₹5,798 crore in 2013-14 to ₹29,550 crore in 2025-26, indicating the scale of public investment behind the expansion.

What Is IOS SAGAR 2026? India's New Maritime Mission Explained

In the News: The Indian Navy launched the second edition of Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR, reinforcing India's commitment to collaborative maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The initiative coincides with India's assumption of chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in February 2026, with 16 IONS member nations participating in this edition.

Key Points:

- **What is IOS SAGAR?** IOS SAGAR (Indian Ocean Ship – Security and Growth for All in the Region) is a unique operational engagement programme by the Indian Navy that enables naval personnel from Friendly Foreign Countries to train and sail together onboard an Indian Naval Ship, promoting interoperability and shared maritime understanding.
- **Strategic Framework:** The initiative is aligned with India's vision of SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region and advances the broader MAHASAGAR framework, which stands for Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security Across the Regions.
- **IONS Chairmanship:** India assumed the Chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in February 2026, making this edition particularly significant, as it brings together 16 IONS nations from the Indian Ocean Region under one maritime cooperation umbrella.

- **Training Phase – Kochi:** The programme begins with professional training interactions at Indian Naval training establishments in Kochi, covering key areas such as naval operations, seamanship practices and maritime security concepts.
- **Operational Phase – Joint Deployment at Sea:** Following training, international participants sail onboard an Indian Naval Ship alongside Indian Navy personnel, taking part in live operational activities — directly enhancing practical interoperability.
- **Maritime Engagement Activities:** During the voyage, the ship undertakes port visits and interactions with partner navies and maritime agencies across the region, facilitating exchange of best practices and addressing shared challenges such as piracy, trafficking and disaster response.
- **Participating Nations:** Naval personnel from 16 Friendly Foreign Countries from the Indian Ocean Region are part of the current edition, reflecting the growing scope and regional trust in the initiative.
- **First vs Second Edition:** The second edition builds on the foundation laid by the inaugural IOS SAGAR, expanding participation and aligning it with India's new IONS leadership role.

Transgender Persons Amendment Bill 2026

In the News: The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in the Lok Sabha by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. The Bill seeks to amend the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, and has sparked significant debate among activists and legal experts, particularly regarding its departure from the Supreme Court's landmark NALSA v. Union of India (2014) judgment.

Key Points:

- **Narrower Definition of Transgender Persons:** The Bill removes the existing broad definition under the 2019 Act and replaces it with a specific list of categories. It retains socio-cultural identities such as kinner, hijra, aravani and jogta, and persons with congenital biological variations. However, it removes the categories of trans-men, trans-women (irrespective of surgery/therapy) and genderqueer persons. It also newly includes eunuchs and persons forced to assume a transgender identity through mutilation or surgical/chemical procedures.
- **Abolition of Self-Identification:** The Bill removes Section 4(2) of the 2019 Act, which granted the right to self-perceived gender identity without any medical examination. This directly contradicts the NALSA (2014) verdict, which held that gender identity is a matter of personal autonomy and does not require external or medical proof.
- **Introduction of Medical Board:** The Bill mandates that the District Magistrate issue a certificate of identity only after examining the recommendation of a designated Medical Board, headed by a Chief Medical Officer or Deputy Chief Medical Officer. This introduces clinical gatekeeping into what was previously a purely administrative process.
- **Name Change Provision:** Transgender persons will now be entitled to change their first name on birth certificates and other official documents — but only if they meet the newly proposed, stricter statutory definition and obtain the certificate of identity through the Medical Board process.
- **Mandatory Revised Certificate After Surgery:** Unlike the 2019 Act (which permitted obtaining a revised certificate after gender reassignment surgery), the Bill mandates the person to obtain a revised certificate. The concerned medical institution must also furnish information about the gender change surgery directly to the District Magistrate.
- **New Criminal Offences – Forced Identity:** The Bill introduces a distinct criminal category penalizing anyone who forces or coerces a person (through force, deceit, or allurements) into assuming a transgender identity via emasculation, castration, or hormonal procedures.

Why India and Vietnam Are Working Together on Tribal Welfare and Inclusive Growth

In the News: A high-level bilateral ministerial meeting between India's Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Vietnam's Ministry of Ethnic and Religious Affairs was held in New Delhi on March 18, 2026, to deepen cooperation in tribal and ethnic development. The meeting was co-chaired by Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Shri Jual Oram and Vietnam's Minister Dao Ngoc Dung, marking a significant step in elevating bilateral engagement to the leadership level.

Key Points:

- **Background:** The ministerial meeting built upon earlier official-level discussions held on March 17, 2026, between senior officials led by Smt. Ranjana Chopra, Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs (India), and H.E. Y Thong, Deputy Minister of Ethnic and Religious Affairs (Vietnam), where both sides exchanged perspectives on policy frameworks and best practices concerning tribal and ethnic communities.

- **Strategic Context:** India highlighted Vietnam as a key partner under its Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific vision. The meeting also marks the tenth anniversary of the India-Vietnam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with both sides emphasizing sustained institutional engagement to commemorate this milestone.
- **Cultural and Historical Ties:** Discussions emphasized deep-rooted cultural and civilizational links between the two nations, including shared Buddhist traditions. The recent exposition of the Sacred Relics of Lord Buddha from Sarnath in Vietnam, which attracted millions of devotees, was cited as a powerful example of people-to-people connect.
- **Key Areas of Cooperation:** Both countries identified priority areas for collaboration, including livelihood promotion and skill development, sustainable agriculture practices, value addition to forest-based products, research and institutional partnerships, and cultural preservation and documentation.
- **Vietnam's Ethnic Diversity:** Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups and has been pursuing inclusive growth through targeted interventions in infrastructure, livelihoods, education, healthcare, and cultural preservation — areas of shared interest with India's tribal development policies.
- **Memorandum of Cooperation:** Both sides reviewed a draft Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) to institutionalize collaboration between the two ministries. The Vietnamese side confirmed the draft has been approved and expressed hope for early finalization. An invitation was extended to Minister Jual Oram to visit Vietnam for the formal signing of the agreement.

Krishi Sakhi Initiative and Why It Matters for Women Farmers?

In the News: The Agriculture Insurance Company of India (AIC) has launched the Krishi Sakhi Initiative in 2026 to empower women farmers through crop insurance awareness, financial inclusion, and rural development. The initiative aligns with the United Nations' declaration of 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, recognised through the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Key Points:

- **What is the Krishi Sakhi Initiative?** It is a structured outreach programme launched by the Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd. (AIC) to empower women farmers by improving awareness about crop insurance, financial protection, and risk management, while encouraging their participation in formal agricultural systems.
- **Launched By:** Agriculture Insurance Company of India (AIC) through its Head Office and Regional Offices across the country.
- **Objective:** The initiative recognises the contribution of women in the agriculture sector and aims to provide them access to crop insurance schemes, promote risk management and resilience building, and ensure long-term sustainability in agriculture through knowledge and resources.
- **Global Alignment:** The initiative aligns with the UN-FAO declaration of 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, reinforcing India's commitment to inclusive agricultural growth and women's empowerment.
- **Month-wise Outreach Plan:** The initiative follows a structured monthly activity calendar — in January 2026, an introductory video was released on social media platforms; in February 2026, a Walkathon was organised at AIC's Head Office under the theme #AICforHer, symbolising unity and collective support for women in agriculture; in March 2026, ground-level workshops and awareness programmes are being organised for women farmers focusing on crop insurance schemes and benefits.

RELIEF Scheme 2026

In the News: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has approved the Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation (RELIEF) Scheme with a budget of ₹497 crore under the Export Promotion Mission (EPM). The scheme aims to support Indian exporters facing extraordinary freight escalation, heightened insurance premiums, and war-related risks arising from disruptions in the West Asia maritime corridor.

Key Points:

- **What is the RELIEF Scheme?** RELIEF is a time-bound government initiative launched under the Export Promotion Mission (EPM) to provide a financial and operational safety net for Indian exporters affected by geopolitical disruptions in the Gulf and West Asia maritime corridor, including near-doubling of freight and fuel costs due to the ongoing war.
- **Nodal Agency:** ECGC Ltd. (formerly Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India) serves as the nodal implementing agency, responsible for verifying claims, processing disbursements, and monitoring the scheme's impact through a real-time dashboard-based system.

- **Countries Covered:** The scheme covers consignments destined for or transshipped through UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Israel, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen.
- **Retroactive Risk Coverage:** Exporters who already held ECGC credit insurance for shipments between February 14, 2026 and March 15, 2026 receive up to 100% risk coverage, ensuring enhanced protection for goods already in transit during peak disruption.
- **Prospective Export Support:** For upcoming consignments planned between March 16, 2026 and June 15, 2026, the government supports up to 95% risk coverage to encourage continued trade flows despite logistics uncertainties.
- **Dedicated MSME Relief:** Recognising that many small businesses may not have credit insurance, the scheme offers partial reimbursement of up to 50% for extraordinary freight and insurance burdens for eligible non-ECGC-insured MSMEs, capped at ₹50 lakh per exporter.
- **Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG):** An Inter-Ministerial Group on Supply Chain Resilience has been operationalized to provide holistic support, including easing movement of stranded cargo, waiving storage and dwell time charges at ports, and allowing policy flexibility based on real-time geopolitical shifts.

Model Code of Conduct

In the News: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has enforced the Model Code of Conduct following the announcement of the 2026 General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and the Union Territory of Puducherry, alongside bye-elections in multiple states. The MCC came into immediate effect to ensure a level playing field and prevent misuse of official machinery.

Key Points:

- **What is the MCC?** The Model Code of Conduct is a comprehensive set of guidelines issued by the ECI to regulate the behaviour of political parties, candidates, and the government during the election period. Its objective is to maintain the purity of the electoral process, ensure peace and order, and prevent the ruling party from gaining an unfair advantage through state resources.
- **Constitutional Authority:** The MCC has no direct statutory backing — it is a moral code built on political consensus. The ECI enforces it under Article 324 of the Constitution, which mandates superintendence, direction, and control of elections. Many provisions are indirectly enforceable through the BNS, 2023 and the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951.
- **Duration:** The MCC comes into operation the moment the ECI announces the election schedule and remains active until election results are declared.
- **Evolution:** It originated during the 1960 Kerala Assembly elections as a voluntary consensus among parties and was first widely circulated during the 1962 simultaneous elections. A comprehensive MCC was introduced in 1979, strictly enforced and institutionalized in 1991 under CEC T.N. Seshan, and manifesto guidelines were added in 2013 following a Supreme Court judgment.
- **General Conduct:** Prohibits activities that aggravate communal or caste tensions. Places of worship cannot be used for election propaganda. Criticism of other parties must be confined to policies and programmes, not personal life.
- **Meetings & Processions:** Parties must inform local police in advance about venue and time of meetings. Rival processions must not clash or disrupt each other, and traffic regulations must be strictly adhered to.
- **Polling Day:** No campaigning is allowed within **100 metres** of polling stations. Serving of liquor near booths is strictly banned, and only authorized workers with identity cards are permitted near polling camps.
- **Party in Power:** Ministers cannot combine official visits with electioneering. Government transport and personnel cannot be used for campaigns. No new financial grants, foundation stones, or ad-hoc appointments that could influence voters are permitted once elections are announced.
- **Election Manifestos:** Must not contain promises that vitiate electoral purity and must reflect the rationale and financial means for fulfilling them. This provision was added in 2013 based on the *S. Subramaniam Balaji vs Govt. of Tamil Nadu* Supreme Court case.

India Notifies New Income Tax Rules Under 2025 Act

In the News: The Government of India has notified the Income Tax Rules, 2026, which will come into effect from April 1, 2026. These rules implement the provisions of the Income-tax Act, 2025, replacing older procedural systems with updated compliance structures, stricter reporting mechanisms, and modernised taxation norms for digital and cross-border businesses.

Key Points:

- **About the Reform:** The Income Tax Rules, 2026, mark a major overhaul of procedural and compliance systems under India's direct taxation framework. Notified by the Ministry of Finance, the rules aim to enhance transparency, digitisation and standardisation across the taxation system while reducing the overall number of rules to simplify procedures.
- **Digital Taxation & Significant Economic Presence (SEP):** The rules introduce clear guidelines for taxing digital and remote businesses operating in India. The concept of Significant Economic Presence (SEP) has been strengthened, with tax applicable if transactions exceed ₹2 crore or the user base exceeds 3 lakh users, primarily targeting global digital companies operating in India.
- **Stronger Stock Exchange Compliance:** Stock exchanges will now be required to maintain audit trails for 7 years, prevent deletion of transaction records, and submit monthly reports on modified transactions to improve transparency and data integrity.
- **Capital Gains Rules Simplified:** Clear guidelines have been introduced for complex transactions including debenture conversions, cross-border restructuring, and asset income disclosures. A zero-coupon bond framework has also been introduced, requiring applications 3 months before issuance, investment-grade ratings from two agencies, and defined fund usage timelines.
- **Cross-Border Taxation Powers:** Enhanced powers have been granted to India's tax authorities for cross-border taxation. For non-resident income attribution, authorities can now estimate income using a percentage basis, global profit ratios, or any other reasonable method.
- **Dividend Rules & Domestic Control:** Companies will now be required to maintain share registers, hold general meetings, and pay dividends only within India, implying stronger domestic control over dividend distribution. A simplified expense framework has also been introduced, allowing direct expenses plus an additional 1% of investment value.

CAPF Bill 2026

In the News: The Union Cabinet approved the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026 on March 10, 2026, seeking to formalise and expand IPS deputation in CAPFs. The Bill has triggered significant controversy, with retired CAPF officers demanding public consultation and alleging it contradicts a May 2025 Supreme Court ruling directing progressive reduction of IPS deputation in CAPFs.

Key Points:

- **About CAPFs:** The Central Armed Police Forces include the CRPF, BSF, ITBP, CISE, and SSB, performing critical functions such as border guarding, counter-insurgency operations, and internal security management. The total strength of CAPFs is around 10 lakh personnel, including approximately 13,000 Group A cadre officers, with nearly 93,000 vacancies across all ranks.
- **Existing System of IPS Deputation:** Prior to the Bill, IPS deputation in CAPFs was governed by executive orders, with 20% of DIG-level posts and 50% of IG-level posts reserved for IPS officers. There was no comprehensive statutory framework, leading to ambiguity and prolonged litigation.
- **Key Provisions of the CAPF Bill 2026:** The Bill proposes to formalise and expand IPS deputation by reserving 50% of Inspector General (IG) posts, at least 67% of Additional Director General (ADG) posts, and all posts of Special DG and DG for IPS officers. It also aims to create an umbrella legal framework to regulate recruitment and service conditions of Group A officers in CAPFs.
- **Rationale Behind the Bill:** The government argues the Bill brings administrative clarity by replacing fragmented executive orders with a statutory framework, reduces litigation between cadre and IPS officers, strengthens Centre-State coordination, and enhances operational efficiency through experienced IPS leadership.
- **Supreme Court Judgment (May 2025):** On May 23, 2025, the Supreme Court ruled that Group A Executive Cadre officers of CAPFs are Organised Group A Services (OGAS) and directed progressive reduction of IPS deputation up to the IG level within two years, along with a time-bound cadre and service rules review within six months. The MHA challenged the judgment but the Supreme Court dismissed the review petition on October 28, 2025, making the ruling final.
- **Government's Legislative Response:** The CAPF Bill 2026 is widely seen as a legislative response to balance the Supreme Court's judicial directions with the government's administrative preferences. Critics, however, contend it directly contradicts the court's directive to reduce IPS deputation.

Renewable Energy Ministry demands sweeping powers

In the News: The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has made a case before a parliamentary committee for a significant expansion of its administrative authority, arguing that it should be recognised as the "Central Government" in all matters pertaining to renewables under the Electricity Act, 2003, effectively seeking to redraw institutional boundaries with the Ministry of Power.

Key Points:

- **Background:** As of January 31, 2026, India has installed 271.96 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity out of a total of 520.50 GW, with the MNRE targeting 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030. However, actual electricity generated from non-fossil sources stands at only about 25%, as coal remains the only reliable source for consistent demand.
- **Why MNRE Seeks Expanded Powers:** Fragmented oversight across multiple ministries, central agencies, and state governments is slowing decision-making and affecting the pace of renewable energy deployment.
- **Key Powers Sought:** MNRE has sought authority to design electricity markets for RE, notify bidding guidelines, frame tariff determination principles for the CERC, guide CERC under Section 107 of the Electricity Act, and oversee planning and monitoring of Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPOs).
- **Institutional Claims on Transmission:** MNRE has asked that the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) coordinate with it on RE regulations and that the National Committee on Transmission work under MNRE's guidance — traditionally the turf of the Ministry of Power.
- **Large Hydro Administrative Anomaly:** Large hydropower was reclassified as renewable in 2019, but its administration was never shifted from the Ministry of Power to MNRE, creating a mismatch where targets and administration sit in different ministries.
- **Decentralised RE Gap:** India's decentralised RE share stands at only 15% against a global average of 40%. MNRE acknowledged the absence of a dedicated policy framework for off-grid applications like biogas plants, solar pumps, and rural cold storages.

INTERNATIONAL

22 Year Old Surya Midha Breaks Mark Zuckerberg Record & Joins the Youngest Billionaire List

In the News: In the News: Surya Midha, a 22-year-old Indian-origin entrepreneur and co-founder of AI hiring startup Mercor, beating out Mark Zuckerberg, who debuted at age 23 two decades ago with a personal net worth of \$2.2 billion.

Key Points:

- **Historic Achievement:** Surya Midha has become one of the youngest self-made billionaires in the world at age 22, matching the record previously set by Mark Zuckerberg, who became a billionaire at age 23 following Facebook's explosive growth.
- **Early Life & Background:** Born in Mountain View, California and raised in San Jose, Midha attended Bellarmine College Preparatory (2017–2021), where he excelled as a competitive debater — he and his partner became the first team in history to win three major national debate tournaments in the United States.
- **Education:** Midha joined Georgetown University to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Foreign Service Studies, focusing on global policy, economics, and international affairs. In 2023, after two years, he took an academic leave to co-found Mercor with Brendan Foody and Adarsh Hiremath.
- **About Mercor:** Founded in 2023, Mercor is an AI-powered hiring platform that automates and streamlines recruitment through machine learning-based resume screening, AI-driven interviews, intelligent candidate-job matching, and payroll & workforce management tools — significantly reducing hiring time and improving efficiency.
- **Valuation & Funding:** Mercor achieved extraordinary growth within just two years of its founding. In October 2025, the company raised \$350 million in Series C funding, pushing its valuation to a remarkable \$10 billion.

Kharg Island–Fujairah Attacks

In the News: Geopolitical tensions in West Asia escalated sharply when the US carried out bombing strikes on Iran's Kharg Island, Iran's primary crude oil export hub. Iran retaliated with drone strikes on Fujairah, a key UAE oil trading hub, causing large fires and halting oil loading operations. The attacks have sent global oil prices surging past \$100 per barrel and severely disrupted international shipping through the Persian Gulf.



Key Points:

- **The Attacks — Sequence of Events:** The US and Israel launched strikes against Iran on February 28, 2026, targeting Kharg Island. In retaliation, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) struck oil facilities at Fujairah, UAE with drone attacks on March 14 and March 16, 2026. A drone attack also hit a fuel depot at Dubai International Airport, temporarily suspending flights. Iran warned residents near Fujairah, Jebel Ali, and Khalifa ports to evacuate.
- **Global Impact:** Shipping through the Strait of Hormuz has nearly halted since the initial strikes. Oil prices have surged over 50% in one month — Brent crude crossed \$106/barrel and WTI reached \$100/barrel, the highest since 2022. Iran has also been targeting ships attempting to pass through the maritime corridor.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow maritime chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Approximately 20% of global oil trade passes through it. Iran has the ability to threaten or block shipping through this corridor, making Fujairah's bypass pipeline (Habshan–Fujairah) strategically critical.
- **UAE's Borders:** UAE is bordered by Saudi Arabia (west and south) and Oman (east and northeast). It shares maritime borders in the Persian Gulf with Qatar and Iran.
- **IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps):** Iran's elite military force that controls Kharg Island and has claimed responsibility for the retaliatory strikes on UAE facilities. The IRGC declared US interests in the UAE — including ports, docks, and military locations — as legitimate targets.

Iran War: Why Ras Laffan and South Pars Attacks Compound India's Worries

Why in News: Iran war has entered a more dangerous phase after South Pars, the world's largest gas field shared by Iran and Qatar, was struck, followed by Iranian missile attacks on Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City, the world's biggest LNG hub. This marked a shift from risks to shipping routes alone to direct attacks on energy production and export infrastructure. Oil and gas prices surged, while concerns deepened over prolonged disruption to Gulf energy supplies. For India, the development is especially serious because it depends heavily on Qatari LNG, much of it linked to Ras Laffan.

Key Pointers:

- South Pars is the world's largest natural gas field, located in the Persian Gulf and shared by Iran and Qatar.
- Ras Laffan Industrial City in Qatar is the core of Qatar's LNG system and is associated with roughly one-fifth of global LNG supply.
- Any serious damage to Ras Laffan can keep a major portion of global LNG supply offline and worsen volatility in the international gas market.
- India is highly exposed because Qatar is India's largest source of LNG, and a substantial share of India's LNG imports comes from Ras Laffan-linked supply chains.
- The danger is not only supply loss at source but also transport disruption because the conflict threatens traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for Gulf energy exports.
- Disrupted LNG flows from West Asia can force supply adjustments inside India, affecting industries and putting pressure on the broader economy.

Jones Act Explained: Why the US Suspended a 100-Year-Old Shipping Law

In the News: Amid a major global energy crisis triggered by the Iran-Israel-US conflict and severe disruptions to oil supply through the Strait of Hormuz, US President Donald Trump approved a 60-day temporary waiver of the Jones Act in 2026. The waiver allows foreign-flagged vessels to transport essential commodities between US domestic ports, aiming to ease fuel price pressures and stabilise domestic energy supply chains.

Key Points:

- **What is the Jones Act?** Officially known as the Merchant Marine Act of 1920, the Jones Act is a US federal law that regulates maritime trade between American ports. Introduced after World War I, its primary goals were to ensure national security, reduce dependence on foreign shipping during emergencies, build a strong domestic fleet, and create jobs in shipbuilding and maritime industries.
- **Key Requirements Under the Jones Act:** Any ship transporting goods between two US ports must satisfy four strict conditions — the vessel must be built in the United States, owned mainly by US citizens, registered under the US flag,

and crewed predominantly by Americans. These rules apply to all US waterways, including routes to Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico.

- **Historical Roots — Is It Really 100 Years Old?** While commonly linked to 1920 and World War I, the Jones Act's underlying policy is far older. The US had established similar domestic shipping restrictions in 1898 and 1817, building on principles introduced as far back as 1789. The 1920 Act primarily closed a legal gap identified in 1912 rather than introducing an entirely new policy.
- **Why Was It Waived in 2026?** The ongoing Iran war severely disrupted the Strait of Hormuz, which handles nearly 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas. Oil production losses were estimated at 7–10 million barrels per day, pushing fuel prices sharply higher. The waiver was approved to quickly increase domestic shipping capacity, reduce supply bottlenecks, and ease pressure on energy supply chains. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt stated it would help mitigate short-term disruptions and allow vital resources to flow freely to US ports.
- **What Does the 60-Day Waiver Allow?** For 60 days, foreign-flagged vessels can transport key commodities between US ports, including crude oil, gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, natural gas, fertilisers and coal. This is especially critical for moving fuel from production hubs on the Gulf Coast to high-demand regions on the East and West Coasts, and for ensuring access to fertilisers during the agricultural planting season.

Finland Tops World Happiness Report 2026 Again

In the News: The World Happiness Report 2026 was released on 18 March 2026, ranking Finland as the world's happiest country for the ninth consecutive year. Published by the Wellbeing Research Centre in partnership with analytics firm Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, the report covers 147 countries and this year places special focus on the negative impact of social media on youth well-being. India ranked 116th, a slight improvement from its 118th position in 2025.

Key Points:

- **Finland's Ninth Consecutive Title:** Finland retains the top spot for the ninth year in a row. The report attributes its consistent leadership to a combination of wealth and its equal distribution, a strong welfare state that protects citizens from economic downturns, high trust in government, excellent education and healthcare, and a clean environment with strong work-life balance.
- **No English-Speaking Country in Top 10:** For the second consecutive year, no English-speaking country features in the top 10. The US is ranked 23rd, Canada 25th, and Britain 29th. New Zealand is 11th, Ireland 13th, and Australia 15th.
- **Top 10 Happiest Countries (2026):** Finland leads the rankings for the ninth consecutive year, followed by Iceland (2nd) and Denmark (3rd). Costa Rica claims a historic 4th place — the highest ever ranking for a Latin American country — ahead of Sweden (5th), Norway (6th) and the Netherlands (7th). Israel (8th), Luxembourg (9th) and Switzerland (10th) complete the top ten, with Nordic nations dominating the overall list.
- **Social Media and Youth Well-Being — Key Finding:** The report's central theme is the harmful impact of heavy social media use on young people's happiness, particularly in Western countries. Key findings include that increased screen time reduces well-being, the negative impact is highest among teenagers and young adults, teenage girls are particularly affected (15-year-old girls using social media for 5+ hours reported significant drops in life satisfaction), and young people using social media for less than one hour per day report the highest well-being levels — even higher than non-users.
- **Unhappiest Countries:** Nations in or near conflict zones remain at the bottom. Afghanistan is again the unhappiest country, followed by Sierra Leone and Malawi. Other bottom-ranked nations include Yemen, Lebanon, DR Congo and Zimbabwe.
- **Methodology:** Rankings are based on a three-year average of life evaluations from around 1,00,000 people across 140 countries, assessed on six key factors: GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom to make life choices, generosity, and perceptions of corruption.

Bhumika Shrestha: Nepal's First Transgender Woman MP Makes History

In the News: Bhumika Shrestha, a 37-year-old LGBTQ rights activist, made history by becoming Nepal's first transgender woman lawmaker, confirmed by the Election Commission as a proportional-representation MP for the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP). Her landmark entry into parliament marks a major milestone for inclusivity and representation in South Asia, following national elections held on 5 March 2026.

Key Points:

- **Who is Bhumika Shrestha?** A prominent LGBTQ rights activist aged 37, Bhumika Shrestha has long advocated for the recognition and equal rights of sexual minorities in Nepal. Her election as MP represents years of persistent activism and social struggle for her community. On her historic achievement, she stated: "I am very excited but also feel the responsibility on my shoulders."
- **Political Context – RSP's Rise to Power:** Shrestha's election is closely linked to Nepal's political transformation following deadly anti-corruption protests that toppled the previous government in September 2025. The subsequent national elections of March 5, 2026 brought the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) — led by rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah — to power with a strong mandate, winning 125 of 165 direct seats and 57 proportional seats, securing a total of 182 seats, narrowly missing a two-thirds majority. This centrist, reform-oriented party's victory created opportunities for underrepresented communities.
- **Historic Significance:** Shrestha became the first member of the LGBTQ community to serve in Nepal's public office since an openly gay proportional MP in 2008 — a gap of nearly 18 years. The Blue Diamond Society (BDS) estimates there are over 9,00,000 sexual minorities across Nepal. BDS President Umisha Pandey called the moment "historic", emphasising that only community members truly understand their own struggles.
- **Challenges Ahead:** While expressing excitement, Shrestha acknowledged that despite Nepal's constitutional provisions for the LGBTQ community, these have not yet translated into effective laws and policies. She committed to raising her community's issues in parliament.
- **Nepal's Progressive Stand in South Asia:** Nepal is considered one of the most progressive nations in South Asia regarding LGBTQ rights, with its constitution explicitly recognising rights of sexual minorities — making Shrestha's election a natural, if long-overdue, progression of this legal framework.

Why US is weighing Kharg Island takeover — and why it is a major risk

In the News: The United States is considering plans to occupy or blockade Kharg Island, Iran's critical oil export terminal, to pressure Iran into reopening the Strait of Hormuz. The US had already bombed military targets on the island on March 13, 2026, while sparing its oil infrastructure. The move is seen as a potential precursor to a ground operation.

Key Points:

- **What is Kharg Island?** Kharg Island is a narrow, 8-km-long rocky outcrop located approximately 50 km off the coast of Iran, deep inside the Persian Gulf. Despite its small size, it handles about 90% of Iran's crude oil exports, making it Iran's most sensitive economic target.
- **The US Strike (March 13, 2026):** The US bombed over 90 military targets on Kharg Island — including naval mine storage facilities, missile bunkers, air defences, and a helicopter hangar — while deliberately sparing the oil infrastructure. Trump described it as one of the most powerful bombing raids in Middle East history.
- **Why Occupation is Being Considered:** The US administration is weighing plans to occupy or blockade Kharg Island to compel Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of the world's energy supplies pass. Iran's effective blockade of the strait has caused global energy prices to spiral.
- **Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz:** The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical shipping channels, located south of Iran's coast. Control over Kharg Island could be used as leverage to keep the strait open for global shipping.
- **Troops Being Deployed:** According to Axios, three Marine units are heading to the region, and the Pentagon is preparing to deploy approximately 2,500 Marines and warships. Pentagon officials have also reportedly made detailed preparations for potential ground operations.
- **Iran's Warning:** Iran's military warned that oil and energy infrastructure of firms working with the US would be "immediately destroyed" if Kharg's oil facilities were attacked. Iran also retains capacity to launch large numbers of drones at Gulf Arab neighbours and shipping vessels.

AWARDS AND HONOURS**Indian Animated Film CHYIMI Wins Best Director Award at NYSAF 2026**

In the News: The Indian animated short film CHYIMI won the Best Director Award at the New York Short Animation Festival (NYSAF) 2026. The film was directed by Dr. Partha Sarathi Mahanta, a senior Indian Police Service officer currently



serving as Inspector General of Police (IGP), Assam and Commissioner of Police, Guwahati. The win marks a significant milestone for Indian and Assamese animation on the global stage.

Key Points:

- **About the Film — CHYIMI:** CHYIMI is an Indian animated short film rooted in local culture and lived experiences from Assam and North-East India. The film demonstrates how regional narratives can transcend linguistic and geographical boundaries and resonate with global audiences. It was selected and showcased at the New York Short Animation Festival 2026, one of the prominent international platforms for animated storytelling.
- **Award Won:** CHYIMI won the Best Director Award at NYSAF 2026. This award recognises excellence in storytelling, creativity, and artistic direction in animated filmmaking. The win places CHYIMI among globally acclaimed animated short films.
- **About the Director — Dr. Partha Sarathi Mahanta:** Dr. Mahanta is a senior IPS officer serving as Inspector General of Police (IGP) in Assam and Commissioner of Police, Guwahati. His achievement represents a rare and inspiring blend of public service and creative expression — demonstrating that artistic storytelling can emerge from diverse professional backgrounds.
- **About NYSAF — New York Short Animation Festival:** The New York Short Animation Festival (NYSAF) is a prestigious international event celebrating creativity, originality, and craftsmanship in animated storytelling. It brings together filmmakers and animators from across the world to present diverse styles and narratives through short animated films. Winning at NYSAF is considered a mark of global distinction in animation.

Sahitya Akademi Award 2025 Announced: Full Winners List Across 24 Languages

In the News: Sahitya Akademi announced the winners of the Sahitya Akademi Awards 2025 across 24 Indian languages. The awards are to be presented on March 31, 2026 in New Delhi. Notable awardees include writer Mamta Kalia (Hindi memoir), diplomat-author Navtej Sarna (English novel), and poet Pritpal Singh Betab (Urdu poetry). Each winner receives a prize of ₹1 lakh along with an engraved copper plaque and a shawl.

Key Points:

- **About Sahitya Akademi:** Established by the Government of India in 1954 in New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture. It is India's central institution for literary dialogue, publication, promotion, and cultural unity through literature. It recognises 24 Indian languages and has regional offices in Kolkata, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai.
- **Sahitya Akademi Award — Nature & Prize:** The Sahitya Akademi Award is the second highest honour conferred by the Akademi (after the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship). It is given for outstanding literary works in any of the 24 recognised Indian languages. The award carries a prize of ₹1,00,000 (one lakh rupees) and an engraved copper plaque.
- **Awards 2025 — Genre Breakdown:** This year's awards cover works across multiple literary forms — 8 poetry books, 4 novels, 6 short story collections, 2 essays, 1 literary criticism, 1 autobiography, and 2 memoirs — across all 24 languages.
- **Notable Winners:** Mamta Kalia — Hindi memoir *Jeete Jee Allahabad*; Navtej Sarna (noted diplomat-author) — English novel *Crimson Spring*; Pritpal Singh Betab — Urdu poetry *Safar Jaari Hai*; Devabrat Das — Assamese novel *Karhi Khelar Sadhu*; Prasun Bandyopadhyay — Bengali poetry *Shrestha Kabita*.
- **Sahitya Akademi Fellowship (Highest Honour):** The Sahitya Akademi Fellowship is the highest honour of the Akademi, reserved for "immortals of literature." It is limited to 21 fellows at any given time. Established in 1968, the first fellow was Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. It covers literary work in any of the 24 recognised languages.

The Golden Road' Wins Big: William Dalrymple Honored for Reframing Global History

Why in News: On 17 March 2026, historian William Dalrymple was named winner of the 2026 Mark Lynton History Prize for his book *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World*. The award was announced under the J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project, administered by Columbia Journalism School and the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University. The judges described the book as a perspective-shifting work that places India at the centre of ancient Asian history and broadens the usual focus beyond the Silk Road. The recognition is significant because it gives major international visibility to a work arguing that India's ideas, trade, mathematics, religion, and culture were central to shaping the ancient world.

Key Pointers:

- The award-winning book is *The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World*, published by Bloomsbury.
- The Mark Lynton History Prize carries a cash award of 10,000 US dollars and is given to a book-length work of narrative history that combines intellectual distinction with literary quality.
- The prize forms part of the J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project, established in 1998 and jointly administered by Columbia Journalism School and the Nieman Foundation at Harvard.
- Dalrymple's book argues that for about 1,500 years, India was a major exporter of art, religion, technology, astronomy, literature, mathematics, and ideas across a vast region stretching from the Red Sea to the Pacific.
- The judges said the book makes it difficult to discuss the Silk Road without also recognising the importance of a "Golden Road" through which Indian influence spread westward and eastward.
- The work highlights India's role in developments such as the spread of Buddhism across Asia, the transmission of Indian numerals and the concept of zero, and broader cultural links extending to Southeast Asia and the Roman world.

Rituparna Sengupta Honoured at UK Parliament for Cultural Contribution

In the News: Renowned Indian actress Rituparna Sengupta has been honoured with the Women Empowerment Award for Art and Culture at the House of Commons, Westminster, UK. The award was conferred during an event organised to mark International Women's Day, celebrating women's achievements across diverse fields.

Key Points:

- **The Award:** Rituparna Sengupta received the Women Empowerment Award for Art and Culture, recognising her extensive contributions to Indian cinema and her role in promoting art and culture at a national and regional level.
- **Venue:** The award ceremony was held at the historic House of Commons, Westminster — the lower house of the UK Parliament — symbolising international recognition of her cultural contributions.
- **Presented By:** The award was presented by UK Members of Parliament Seema Malhotra and Virendra Sharma.
- **Organised By:** The event was organised by GloWomen CiC, an organisation focused on promoting women's empowerment initiatives globally.
- **Occasion:** The ceremony was held in celebration of International Women's Day, observed annually on 8 March, highlighting women's achievements across various sectors.
- **Personal Moment:** Her husband, Sanjay Chakrabarty, was present at the ceremony. Sengupta expressed gratitude, calling it "a very special moment."

SCIENCE AND TECH**Atomic Clock on NAVIC Satellite calls time**

In the News: The last functioning atomic clock onboard India's IRNSS-1F navigation satellite stopped working, reducing the number of fully operational NavIC satellites for positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) services to just three — below the minimum of four required for reliable navigation. The failure marks a major setback for India's indigenous satellite navigation system (NavIC/IRNSS), which was developed by ISRO at a cost of approximately Rs 2,250 crore. Six of the eleven NavIC satellites launched so far have now failed, primarily due to atomic clock malfunctions.

Key Points:

- **Clock Failure — IRNSS-1F:** The last functional atomic clock on IRNSS-1F stopped working on 13 March 2026. The satellite, launched on 10 March 2016, had already completed its 10-year design mission life. It had been operating with only one of its three onboard atomic clocks. It will now only provide limited one-way broadcast messaging services.
- **Impact on NavIC:** The failure reduces fully operational NavIC satellites for PNT services to just three — IRNSS-1B, IRNSS-1I, and NVS-01 (IRNSS-1J). A minimum of four satellites is required for accurate position, navigation, and timing services. Location services provided by NavIC in India are now going to be affected.
- **NavIC Constellation Status:** Of the 11 satellites launched for NavIC since 2013: 3 provide PNT services, 5 provide one-way broadcast messaging only, 1 was decommissioned, 1 (NVS-02/IRNSS-1K) failed to reach optimum orbit in 2025, and 1 (IRNSS-1H) also failed to reach orbit in 2017.



- **Why Atomic Clocks are Critical:** Navigation systems determine position by measuring the time taken for signals to travel from satellites to Earth. Small atomic clock errors can skew position data by several hundred kilometres. Each satellite carries three onboard atomic clocks as backup systems to ensure uninterrupted operation.
- **History of Clock Failures:** Six NavIC satellites have failed primarily due to atomic clock malfunctions: IRNSS-1A (2013), IRNSS-1C (2014), IRNSS-1D (2015), IRNSS-1E (2016), IRNSS-1G (2016), and now IRNSS-1F (2026). The clocks were imported from a European supplier under a ~USD 4 million deal for an estimated 45 clocks.
- **Origin of NavIC — Kargil Connection:** ISRO began work on the IRNSS/NavIC programme in 1999 after the Kargil War, when India's defence forces were denied access to the US-owned GPS system for locational support in the conflict zone. This highlighted India's strategic vulnerability to foreign-controlled navigation systems.
- **Indigenous Atomic Clock Progress:** Earlier NavIC satellites used atomic clocks imported from SpectraTime, Switzerland (and later a European supplier). NVS-01 (IRNSS-1J, launched 2023) is the first satellite with a mix of indigenous and foreign atomic clocks. NVS-02 (IRNSS-1K, 2025) also carried indigenous clocks but failed to reach its intended orbit.

Gujarat Tested Its First Sounding Rocket Successfully Launched Near Dholera

In the News: Gujarat scripted history as Ahmedabad-based startup OmSPACE Rocket and Exploration Pvt Ltd successfully launched the state's first sounding rocket near Dholera, marking a significant milestone for India's private space sector.

Key Points:

- **Launch Details:** The rocket was launched from Bavliyari village near Dholera at around 1 PM on March 15, 2026, from a temporary launch facility, in the presence of Arjun Modhwadia, Gujarat's Minister for Science and Technology.
- **Mission Achievement:** The single-stage sub-orbital sounding rocket successfully reached an altitude of approximately 3 kilometres, completing all primary technical objectives during the flight.
- **Key Systems Tested:** The mission validated three critical aerospace systems — advanced propulsion technology, avionics and onboard control systems, and an autonomous recovery mechanism — proving that Indian startups can design and test space launch systems domestically.
- **Scientific Payload:** The rocket carried a weather mini-satellite payload designed to collect atmospheric data during flight, demonstrating how sounding rockets can be used for weather pattern research and environmental monitoring at different altitudes.
- **Advanced Materials:** According to founder and CEO Ravindra Raj, the rocket's airframe was built using carbon fibre and advanced composite materials, developed at OmSPACE's Ahmedabad laboratory under the Make in India initiative, improving performance by reducing structural weight while maintaining high strength.
- **Regulatory Support:** The launch was conducted with approvals from the Airports Authority of India (AAI), DGCA, and the Indian Coast Guard, and was authorized by IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre), the nodal body for private sector space activities in India.

ENVIRONMENT

'Tiger Deaths' in country

In the News: Maharashtra Forest Minister Ganesh Naik informed the State Legislative Council during the Budget session that 166 tiger deaths were recorded across India in 2025, of which 41 occurred in Maharashtra — the highest share among all states. The data was sourced from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The disclosure came in response to queries about recent tiger deaths at the Pench Tiger Reserve, Nagpur, and has renewed focus on anti-poaching measures, human-wildlife conflict, and the proposed downgrading of leopard protection under the Wildlife Protection Act.

Key Points:

- **Tiger Deaths in 2025:** A total of 166 tigers died across India in 2025 as per NTCA data. Maharashtra recorded 41 deaths — the highest share — followed by deaths reported from states including Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Uttarakhand, and others.
- **Pench Tiger Reserve Deaths:** Recent deaths in Pench Tiger Reserve, Nagpur, include one adult tiger and two cubs. A cub death on 7 January 2026 was attributed to a fight among tigers, while another decomposed carcass appeared to be due to natural causes.



- **Anti-Poaching Measures:** Maharashtra has deployed: Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) for regular patrolling; dog squads to monitor hunting; M-Stripes app on field staff mobiles to track suspicious movements; informers at range level; wireless communication in hypersensitive areas; and checkposts for vehicle inspections.
- **Wildlife Crime Cell & Cyber Cell:** A Wildlife Crime Cell has been established at the Office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Nagpur. A Cyber Cell at Melghat Tiger Reserve tracks accused individuals involved in poaching. A Rapid Rescue Unit and Transit Treatment Centre have also been created.
- **Leopard Protection Controversy:** The Maharashtra State Cabinet has approved a proposal to move leopards from Schedule I (highest protection) to Schedule II (less stringent penalties) of the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA), and has approached the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to formalise the change.
- **About NTCA:** The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, established under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (amended 2006). It oversees Project Tiger and monitors tiger populations and deaths across India.
- **Wildlife Protection Act — Schedules:** Schedule I of the WLPA provides the highest level of legal protection to listed species, with the most stringent penalties for hunting or trade. Schedule II offers lower-level protection with less severe penalties. Tigers are listed under Schedule I.

India Submits First National Report on Nagoya Protocol

In the News: India submitted its First National Report (NR1) on the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) to the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The report was prepared by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in collaboration with the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), covering the period from November 1, 2017 to December 31, 2025.

Key Points:

- **About the Nagoya Protocol:** The Nagoya Protocol is a supplementary agreement under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It deals with Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits arising from their utilisation (ABS). It came into force in 2014 and aims to ensure that benefits derived from genetic resources are shared equitably with the communities and countries from which those resources originate.
- **India's First National Report (NR1):** Submitted on February 27, 2026, in accordance with Article 29 of the Nagoya Protocol (on Monitoring and Reporting). It covers 2017–2025 and was preceded by an Interim National Report submitted in November 2017. The report contributes to Target 13 of India's updated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).
- **India's Legal Framework for ABS:** India's ABS framework is built on the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, supported by the Biological Diversity Rules, 2024 and the ABS Regulations, 2025. These laws regulate access to biological resources and ensure benefit-sharing with local communities and traditional knowledge holders.
- **Three-Tier Institutional Structure:** India's ABS implementation follows a three-tier structure — the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at the national level, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) / UT Biodiversity Councils (UTBCs) at the state level, and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) at the local level. Over 2,76,653 BMCs have been established across the country, enabling grassroots biodiversity governance.
- **Internationally Recognised Certificates of Compliance (IRCCs):** India has published 3,556 IRCCs on the ABS Clearing-House in accordance with Article 17 of the Nagoya Protocol. This represents over 60% of the global total, reflecting India's leadership in ABS transparency and compliance.
- **Monitoring Foreign Bioresources:** Under Rule 18 of BD Rules, 2024 and Section 36A of BD Act, 2002, India monitors the use of foreign-sourced biological resources. The NBA received 41 declarations in Form 10 for use of foreign biological resources during the reporting period.

Kalinjar Hill Declared National Geo-Heritage Site

In the News: The Geological Survey of India (GSI) officially designated the Kalinjar hill area surrounding Kalinjar Fort in Banda district, Uttar Pradesh as a National Geo-Heritage Site. It is the first geo-heritage site to be officially designated in Uttar Pradesh, recognising the region's exceptional geological, historical, cultural and religious significance within the Vindhya mountain range.

Key Points:

- **What is the Eparchaean Unconformity?** The primary reason for the geo-heritage designation is the presence of the rare Eparchaean Unconformity — a geological phenomenon where rock layers from vastly different time periods come into direct contact. At Kalinjar, 2.5-billion-year-old Bundelkhand granite is overlain by 1.2-billion-year-old Kaimur sandstone, offering a rare physical window into Earth's ancient crustal evolution and geological history.
- **First in UP, Second in India (of its kind):** Kalinjar is UP's first National Geo-Heritage Site. Another notable Eparchaean Unconformity already designated as a National Geo-Heritage Monument is the Tirupati Eparchaean Unconformity in Andhra Pradesh.
- **Historical Importance:** Kalinjar Fort has been a major political and military centre across centuries. It was part of the Chedi kingdom (during the time of Gautama Buddha), later absorbed into the Mauryan Empire, and passed through the Gupta, Chandela, Mughal and Maratha periods. The site also finds mention in Buddhist literature.
- **Conservation Impact:** The geo-heritage status prevents uncontrolled quarrying and construction in the area, safeguarding not just the fort monument but the entire surrounding landscape, rock faces and built heritage as one unified protected zone. GSI will install informational signage and panels explaining the Eparchaean Unconformity, rock layers and fort history for visitors and students.
- **Tourism and Development:** The Uttar Pradesh government has approved a ₹12 crore development project to transform Kalinjar Fort into a heritage-tourism destination. Authorities plan to integrate Kalinjar into a tourism circuit connecting Kalinjar, Khajuraho and Chitrakoot, boosting local employment, handicrafts and hospitality in the Bundelkhand region.

IMPORTANT DAYS

International Day of Forests 2026: Theme, Importance and Global Significance

In the News: The International Day of Forests 2026 was observed on March 21, 2026, with the theme "Forests and Economies", highlighting the critical role forests play in driving economic prosperity, sustaining livelihoods, and supporting long-term sustainable development worldwide.

Key Points:

- **About the Day:** The International Day of Forests is observed annually on March 21. It was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012 to promote conservation and sustainable use of forest resources. Countries are encouraged to carry out local, national and international activities linked to forests and trees, including tree planting drives.
- **2026 Theme — "Forests and Economies":** The theme emphasises the strong link between forests and economic development. Forests provide income, employment and raw materials supporting industries and communities. They also sustain family and community-based agriculture, improve agricultural productivity, and protect watersheds.
- **Economic Significance of Forests:** According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), more than 1.6 billion people depend on forests for subsistence, income or employment. The forest sector provides at least 13 million formal jobs, along with 45–50 million jobs in informal and small-scale forest-based enterprises.
- **Role in Bioeconomy:** As countries transition towards a sustainable bioeconomy, forest products offer nature-based alternatives to carbon-intensive materials while creating new economic opportunities. The 2026 theme seeks to place forests at the centre of sustainable, resilient and long-term economic planning.

SPORTS

IPL 2026 Schedule (Updated): Date, Match List, Venues and Teams

In the News: IPL 2026 is set to be the biggest season in the tournament's history, featuring 84 matches (up from the usual 74), with Royal Challengers Bengaluru entering as defending champions after their IPL 2025 title win over Punjab Kings.

Key Points:

- **Tournament Window:** IPL 2026 is scheduled to begin in March 2026 and conclude in May 2026, following the traditional Indian summer window. The season opener is RCB vs Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 28 in Bengaluru at 7:30 PM.
- **Record Scale:** With 84 total matches across the season, IPL 2026 is the largest edition in IPL history, surpassing the previous standard of 74 matches.



- **Participating Teams (10):** Chennai Super Kings, Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Kolkata Knight Riders, Sunrisers Hyderabad, Delhi Capitals, Rajasthan Royals, Punjab Kings, Lucknow Super Giants, and Gujarat Titans.
- **Match Format:** All ten teams compete in a League Stage, followed by Playoffs — comprising Qualifier 1, Eliminator, Qualifier 2, and the Final — with the top four teams advancing from the league stage.
- **Venues (12 cities):** Matches will be hosted across Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Mohali (Mullanpur), Dharamshala, and **Guwahati** — notable as a non-traditional IPL venue hosting early fixtures.
- **Early Fixtures Highlight:** The first week features marquee clashes including MI vs KKR (March 29, Mumbai), RR vs CSK (March 30, Guwahati), and RCB vs CSK (April 5, Bengaluru).
- **Defending Champions: Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB)** enter IPL 2026 as title holders, having defeated Punjab Kings in the IPL 2025 Final, and will aim to become back-to-back champions.

FIFA World Cup 2026 Safe from WADA Ban Rule

In the News: WADA has postponed its decision on a proposed rule that could ban government officials — including U.S. President Donald Trump — from attending major sporting events over unpaid dues. The decision has been deferred to September 2026, two months after the FIFA World Cup 2026 concludes in the USA, Mexico, and Canada.

Key Points:

- **The Proposed Rule:** WADA's executive committee is considering a rule that would bar government officials of countries that fail to pay their dues from attending major international sporting events, including the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup.
- **Decision Deferred:** The final decision has been officially postponed to September 2026 — after the FIFA World Cup ends — as WADA stated that broader consultation is needed given the rule's global implications and sensitivity.
- **US-WADA Funding Dispute:** The United States has withheld approximately \$7.3 million in dues since 2023, protesting WADA's handling of doping cases, particularly those involving Chinese swimmers who tested positive for a banned substance but were allowed to compete.
- **World Cup 2026 Unaffected:** The delay ensures the FIFA World Cup 2026 proceeds without any restrictions on political figures attending matches.
- **Future Events at Risk:** If adopted, the rule could potentially impact the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and the 2034 Winter Games in Utah, raising serious questions about enforcement and diplomatic tensions.
- **Bipartisan US Opposition:** The US-WADA dispute has drawn rare bipartisan support in Congress, with both Republican and Democratic lawmakers backing the decision to withhold dues and demand greater accountability and transparency from WADA.
- **WADA's Concern:** WADA officials have warned that funding instability undermines the global anti-doping programme and could ultimately harm athletes worldwide if member country contributions remain politically influenced.

STATIC

Crowds throng lake for Mahad Satyagraha at 99

In the News: Thousands gathered at Mahad in Maharashtra's Raigad district to mark the beginning of the centenary year of the historic Chavdar Tale Satyagraha, led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on March 20, 1927, when he asserted the right of Dalit communities to drink water from a public tank.

Key Points:

- **The Mahad Satyagraha (1927):** On March 20, 1927, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar led thousands of people to drink water from the Chavdar Tale (lake) in Mahad, asserting the right of the then "untouchable" communities to access public facilities. This movement predated the Salt Satyagraha by three years.
- **March 20 — Social Empowerment Day:** March 20 is observed as Social Empowerment Day in India in commemoration of the Mahad Satyagraha.
- **Centenary Year Significance:** The year 2026–2027 has been declared the Year of Social Harmony and Equality by the Maharashtra government, as it also coincides with the 200th birth anniversary of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and the 150th birth anniversary of Saint Gadge Maharaj.



- **Government Initiatives:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis performed the bhoomipoojan for the 'Chavdar Tale Water Purification and Premises Beautification Project', aimed at providing clean water, a welcoming environment for visitors, and preservation of the site's sanctity.
- **CPI(M) Convention:** The CPI(M), along with the Jati Ant Sangharsh Samiti, organised a two-day 'Human Rights Convention against Manuwad and Capitalism' on March 19–20 at Mahad. CPI(M) General Secretary M. A. Baby called upon participants to carry Ambedkar's legacy of social transformation to the masses throughout the year.
- **Manusmriti Burning Centenary:** December 25, 2027 will mark the centenary of Dr. Ambedkar's public burning of the Manusmriti in Mahad. The CPI(M) and allied organisations plan to hold a larger gathering in Mahad in December to mark the occasion.
- **R. B. More Remembered:** Leaders paid tribute to R. B. More, a key organiser of the Mahad Satyagraha. His grandson Subodh More recalled how the 1927 movement marked the emergence of leadership from within the Dalit community.

