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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Haryana YouTuber Booked Under Official Secrets Act for 'Spying for Pakistan': What Exactly Has Jyoti Rani Been Charged With

In the News: On May 17, 2025, Haryana Police arrested 33-year-old travel vlogger Jyoti Malhotra, also known as Jyoti Rani, from Hisar. She is accused of espionage for allegedly sharing sensitive information with Pakistani intelligence operatives. Malhotra, who runs the YouTube channel "Travel with Jo" with over 377,000 subscribers, has been charged under Sections 3 and 5 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923, and Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which pertains to acts endangering India's sovereignty and integrity.

Key Details:

- **Alleged Espionage Activities:** Authorities allege that Malhotra maintained consistent contact with Pakistani intelligence operatives and transmitted sensitive information via social media apps including WhatsApp, Telegram, and Snapchat. She is accused of sharing details about Indian Army movements in Haryana and Punjab, and of promoting a positive image of Pakistan through her content.
- **Connections with Pakistani Officials:** During preliminary interrogation, Malhotra reportedly confessed to meeting a Pakistani national named Ahsan-ur-Rahim, also known as "Danish," at the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi in 2023 while applying for a visa. Following this meeting, she allegedly traveled to Pakistan twice, where she met individuals connected to Pakistani intelligence agencies.

Supreme Court Strikes Down Centre's Orders on Retrospective Green Clearances

In the News: On May 16, 2025, the Supreme Court of India invalidated the Centre's 2017 notification and 2021 office memorandum that permitted retrospective (ex post facto) environmental clearances for projects initiated without prior approval. The Court deemed these measures illegal, emphasizing that such clearances violate the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of 2006 and infringe upon citizens' fundamental right to a pollution-free environment under Article 21 of the Constitution. This landmark judgment arose from a petition filed by the NGO Vanashakti.

Key Details:

- **Violation of Environmental Jurisprudence:** The Court held that granting ex post facto environmental clearances is "completely alien to environmental jurisprudence" and undermines the precautionary principle, which mandates prior assessment of potential environmental impacts before project initiation.
- **Illegal Regularization of Projects:** The 2017 notification and 2021 office memorandum attempted to regularize projects that had commenced without mandatory prior environmental clearance. The Court found this approach illegal, stating that it effectively condoned violations of environmental laws.
- **Reinforcement of EIA 2006 Requirements:** The judgment reaffirmed that the EIA Notification of 2006 requires mandatory prior environmental clearance for specific categories of projects. The Court emphasized that this requirement is non-negotiable and essential for safeguarding environmental and public health.
- **Implications for Ongoing and Future Projects:** While the Court allowed existing clearances granted under the 2017 and 2021 provisions to remain valid, it barred the Centre from issuing any future notifications or orders permitting retrospective clearances. This decision impacts numerous projects across sectors, including infrastructure, mining, and irrigation, particularly those that commenced without prior environmental approval.
- **Upholding Fundamental Rights:** The Court underscored that the right to a clean and healthy environment is integral to the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. It criticized the Centre for attempting to protect entities that had caused environmental harm, stating that development should not come at the expense of environmental conservation.

Government Forms 7 All-Party Teams, 3 Headed by Opposition Leaders, to Mobilize Global Support

In the News: On May 17, 2025, the Indian government announced the formation of seven all-party parliamentary delegations comprising 51 Members of Parliament (MPs) to visit over 30 countries. This initiative aims to present a united national front and garner international support against terrorism, particularly in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation

Sindoor. Notably, three of these delegations are led by Opposition leaders, including Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, NCP's Supriya Sule, and DMK's Kanimozhi.

Key Details:

- **Objective:** The delegations are tasked with conveying India's zero-tolerance stance on terrorism to key global partners, countering disinformation, and reinforcing the country's commitment to combating cross-border terrorism.
- **Delegation Leadership:**
 - **Shashi Tharoor (Congress):** Leading the delegation to the United States, Panama, Guyana, Brazil, and Colombia.
 - **Supriya Sule (NCP):** Heading the team visiting South Africa, Qatar, Egypt, and Ethiopia.
 - Other delegations are led by BJP's Ravi Shankar Prasad and Baijayant Panda, JD(U)'s Sanjay Kumar Jha, and Shiv Sena's Shrikant Eknath Shinde.
- **Composition:** Each delegation comprises six to seven MPs from various political parties, including members from the ruling NDA and the Opposition INDIA bloc. The teams are accompanied by diplomats and liaison officers to facilitate engagements with foreign governments, media, academia, and opinion makers.
- **Timeline:** The delegations are scheduled to depart from New Delhi on May 22-23, 2025, embarking on a 10-day mission to engage with international stakeholders and present India's position on terrorism.

PM Modi to Launch Gyan Bharatam Mission

In the News: On June 9, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to launch the Gyan Bharatam Mission, a comprehensive initiative aimed at preserving and promoting India's rich manuscript heritage. Announced in the Union Budget 2025-26, this mission seeks to digitize, conserve, and make accessible over one crore (10 million) manuscripts, thereby safeguarding the nation's intellectual legacy and integrating ancient wisdom with modern education and technology.

Key Details:

- **Objective:** The mission aims to systematically survey, document, conserve, and digitize over one crore manuscripts housed in academic institutions, museums, libraries, and private collections across India.
- **Revamping the National Manuscripts Mission (NMM):** Originally launched in 2003 under the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), the NMM faced challenges in scaling up due to institutional constraints. The Gyan Bharatam Mission revamps this initiative with a standalone structure, allowing for greater efficiency and agility.
- **Budget Allocation:** The Union Government has significantly increased the financial allocation for the manuscripts initiative from ₹3.5 crore to ₹60 crore, with a total outlay of ₹482.85 crore for 2024-31.
- **National Digital Repository:** A centralized digital platform will be established to house the digitized manuscripts, promoting knowledge sharing and research. This repository will integrate AI-driven archiving, metadata tagging, and translation tools to facilitate wider access for scholars, researchers, and the general public.

Sharp Decline in Government School Enrolment and PM-POSHAN Coverage Raises Alarm

In the News: In the 2024-25 academic year, the Ministry of Education (MoE) reported a significant drop in student enrolment in government and government-aided schools across 23 Indian states and Union Territories. This decline has raised concerns about the effectiveness of foundational education and child nutrition programs, notably the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM-POSHAN) scheme, formerly known as the Midday Meal Scheme. The MoE has requested affected states to investigate the causes and submit remedial action plans by June 30, 2025.

Key Details:

- **Enrolment Decline:**
 - Uttar Pradesh experienced the most significant drop, with over 21.83 lakh fewer students enrolled.
 - Other states with notable declines include Bihar (6.14 lakh), Rajasthan (5.63 lakh), and West Bengal (4.01 lakh).
- **PM-POSHAN Scheme Coverage:**
 - The PM-POSHAN scheme aims to provide nutritious meals to children from pre-primary to Class 8 in government and aided schools.
 - Despite its objectives, several states have reported decreased coverage:
 - Uttar Pradesh: 5.41 lakh fewer children covered.
 - Rajasthan: 3.27 lakh fewer.
 - West Bengal: 8.04 lakh fewer.
 - Delhi: 97,000 fewer.

• Possible Causes:

- Stricter data verification processes have eliminated duplicate and "ghost" entries, leading to more accurate but lower enrolment figures.
- Post-COVID shifts, with students returning to private schools perceived to offer better quality education.
- In some areas, students are bringing their own meals, indicating possible issues with the PM-POSHAN scheme's implementation.

• Government Response:

- The MoE has expressed deep concern over these trends and has asked states to identify underlying causes and propose corrective measures.
- States are expected to submit detailed reports by June 30, 2025.

Mhadei River Water Dispute

In the News: The long-standing water-sharing conflict over the Mhadei River between Goa and Karnataka has resurfaced, with renewed protests and legal challenges. Goa has approached the Supreme Court seeking a stay on the Central Water Commission's approval of Karnataka's Kalasa-Banduri project, which aims to divert water from the Mhadei River to the Malaprabha basin.

Key Highlights:

- **River Overview:** The Mhadei River, also known as the Mandovi in Goa, originates from the Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka. It flows for approximately 111 km, traversing Karnataka (35 km), Goa (76 km), and a small stretch in Maharashtra, before emptying into the Arabian Sea.
- **Kalasa-Banduri Project:** Karnataka proposes to divert 7.56 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) of water from the Mhadei's tributaries, Kalasa and Banduri, to the Malaprabha River to address drinking water needs in its northern districts. Goa opposes this, citing potential ecological damage and reduced water availability.
- **Tribunal Verdict:** In August 2018, the Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal allocated 24 TMC of water to Goa, 13.42 TMC to Karnataka (including 5.5 TMC for drinking water and 8 TMC for hydroelectric power), and 1.33 TMC to Maharashtra. The verdict has been contested by the involved states.
- **Legal Proceedings:** Goa filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court challenging the tribunal's decision and the subsequent approval of Karnataka's project by the Central Water Commission. The matter is pending adjudication.

President Murmu Confers Highest Literary Honour to Gulzar & Rambhadracharya

In the News: On May 16, 2025, President Droupadi Murmu presented the 58th Jnanpith Award to two distinguished literary figures—renowned Urdu poet and lyricist Gulzar and esteemed Sanskrit scholar Jagadguru Rambhadracharya—at a ceremony held at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi.

Key Highlights:

- **Gulzar (Sampooran Singh Kalra):** Born in 1934, Gulzar is celebrated for his profound contributions to Urdu poetry, Hindi cinema, and literature. His illustrious career spans over six decades, during which he has been honored with numerous accolades, including the Sahitya Akademi Award (2002), Padma Bhushan (2004), Dadasaheb Phalke Award (2013), Academy Award (2009), and Grammy Award (2010).
- **Jagadguru Rambhadracharya:** A revered Sanskrit scholar and spiritual leader, Rambhadracharya has authored over 240 books and texts across multiple Indian languages. Despite losing his eyesight at the age of two months, he has made monumental contributions to Sanskrit literature and education, including founding the Jagadguru Rambhadracharya Handicapped University in Chitrakoot. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2015.
- **Award Significance:** The Jnanpith Award, instituted in 1961, is India's highest literary honor, recognizing outstanding contributions to literature in Indian languages. The award comprises a citation, a cash prize, and a bronze replica of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge.

Astrophysicist Jayant Narlikar Passes Away: Understanding the Hoyle–Narlikar Theory of Gravity

In the News: Renowned Indian astrophysicist and science communicator **Dr. Jayant Vishnu Narlikar** passed away at the age of 87 in Pune on May 20, 2025. Celebrated for his pioneering contributions to cosmology, Narlikar co-developed the **Hoyle–Narlikar theory of gravity**, offering an alternative to Einstein's General Theory of Relativity.

Key Highlights

- **Alternative to General Relativity:** The Hoyle–Narlikar theory, developed in 1964 with British astrophysicist Fred Hoyle, sought to improve upon Einstein's General Theory of Relativity by incorporating **Mach's Principle**, which posits that the inertia of a body is influenced by the mass distribution of the entire universe.
- **Creation Field (C-field):** The theory introduced a hypothetical "**creation field**" (**C-field**), a negative-energy field responsible for the continuous creation of matter. This concept supported the **steady-state cosmology**, suggesting that the universe has no beginning and will exist forever, contrasting with the Big Bang theory.
- **Challenges and Legacy:** While the Hoyle–Narlikar theory faced challenges, especially after the discovery of the cosmic microwave background radiation in 1965, which supported the Big Bang model, it remains significant for its attempt to integrate Mach's Principle into cosmology.

Tenure of 'Superspy' Tapan Kumar Deka Extended as Intelligence Bureau Chief

In the News: On May 20, 2025, the Indian government granted a one-year extension to Tapan Kumar Deka, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), extending his tenure until June 2026. This marks his second consecutive extension since his initial appointment in July 2022.

Key Highlights

- **Extended Leadership Amid Security Challenges:** The extension comes in the wake of heightened security concerns following India's Operation Sindoor, a retaliatory strike against terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir after the Pahalgam terrorist attack. Deka's continued leadership is seen as vital in navigating these challenges.
- **Longest-Serving IB Chief Since 2005:** With this extension, Deka becomes the longest-serving head of the IB since the tenure for the position was formally fixed at two years in 2005.
- **Distinguished Career in Intelligence:** A 1988-batch IPS officer from the Himachal Pradesh cadre, Deka has been instrumental in counter-terrorism operations, including the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, and has played a pivotal role in dismantling terror networks like the Indian Mujahideen.
- **Expertise in Handling Northeast Insurgency:** Deka has extensive experience in managing insurgency-related challenges in the northeastern states of India, contributing significantly to the region's stability.
- **Close Association with National Security Leadership:** Known for his strategic acumen, Deka is considered a close aide of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, reflecting his integral role in shaping India's internal security policies.

Supreme Court Mandates Three Years of Legal Practice for Judicial Service Aspirants

In the News: On May 20, 2025, the Supreme Court of India ruled that candidates must have a minimum of three years of legal practice to be eligible for entry-level judicial service examinations. This decision overturns a 2002 judgment that allowed fresh law graduates to directly enter the judiciary. The ruling aims to ensure that aspiring judges possess practical courtroom experience before assuming judicial responsibilities.

Key Highlights

- **Mandatory Legal Practice:** Candidates aspiring to become Civil Judges (Junior Division) must now have at least three years of legal practice. This experience can include time spent as a law clerk.
- **Certification Requirement:** Applicants must provide a certificate verifying their legal practice, issued by a senior advocate with a minimum of 10 years of standing at the Bar and endorsed by a principal judicial officer.
- **Prospective Implementation:** The new requirement will apply to future recruitment processes. Ongoing or already notified recruitment drives will proceed under existing eligibility criteria.
- **Rationale for the Decision:** The Supreme Court observed that appointing fresh law graduates without any practical experience has led to challenges in judicial functioning. The court emphasized that hands-on experience is crucial for judges who deal with complex issues related to life, liberty, and property.

Mizoram Becomes India's First Fully Literate State

In the News: On May 20, 2025, Mizoram achieved a historic milestone by being declared India's first fully literate state. The announcement was made by Chief Minister Lalduhoma during a special ceremony at Mizoram University in Aizawl, in the presence of Union Minister of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary and other dignitaries.

Key Highlights

- **Literacy Rate Achievement:** Mizoram attained a literacy rate of 98.2%, surpassing the Ministry of Education's benchmark of 95%.
- **Implementation of ULLAS/NILP:** The milestone was achieved under the "Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society" (ULLAS) initiative, also known as the New India Literacy Programme (NILP). This program identified 3,026 illiterate individuals, of whom 1,692 enrolled as learners. A dedicated team of 292 volunteer teachers, including students and educators, facilitated this achievement.
- **Cultural Ethos:** The success reflects the Mizo cultural value of *Tlawmngaihna*, emphasizing selflessness and community service.
- **Future Goals:** Building on this foundation, Mizoram aims to expand literacy beyond basic reading and writing to include digital, financial, and entrepreneurial skills, ensuring holistic education for all.
- **Historical Context:** Mizoram's journey toward full literacy began with a strong foundation; the 2011 Census recorded a literacy rate of 91.33%, ranking it third in the country at that time.

Annual Review of State Laws 2024: Declining Productivity and Legislative Trends

In the News: The PRS Legislative Research released its "Annual Review of State Laws 2024," highlighting a concerning decline in the productivity of India's state legislative assemblies. The report underscores issues such as reduced sitting days, minimal legislative scrutiny, and the passage of significant bills without adequate debate.

Key Findings

- **Reduced Sitting Days:** In 2024, state assemblies met for an average of only 20 days, a decrease from 28 days in 2017. Odisha (42 days) and Kerala (38 days) had the highest sittings, while larger states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh met for just 16 days.
- **Vacant Deputy Speaker Positions:** Despite Article 178 of the Constitution mandating the election of a Deputy Speaker in every State Legislative Assembly, eight assemblies currently lack one. Notably, Jharkhand has been without a Deputy Speaker for over 20 years.
- **Rapid Passage of Bills:** States passed an average of 17 bills in 2024, with over 51% passed on the same day they were introduced, often without debate. This trend raises concerns about the weakening of deliberative democracy.

Notable Legislative Developments

- **Karnataka's Legislative Activity:** Karnataka set a national record by passing 49 bills in 2024, surpassing the national average of 17 bills per state. Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra followed with 45 and 32 bills, respectively.
- **Uniform Civil Code in Uttarakhand:** Uttarakhand became the first state to enact a Uniform Civil Code, standardizing laws related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and live-in relationships, applicable to all residents except Scheduled Tribes.
- **Marriage Age Amendment in Himachal Pradesh:** Himachal Pradesh increased the minimum marriage age for girls from 18 to 21 years, aligning with national legislation.
- **Land Rights Reform in Tamil Nadu:** Tamil Nadu amended its land reform laws to remove discriminatory provisions that treated unmarried adult daughters and granddaughters differently from their male counterparts regarding landholding rights.

The Veeraswami Case Revisited: Vice President Dhankhar's Call for Judicial Accountability

In the News: In May 2025, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar publicly questioned the constitutional validity of the Supreme Court's in-house inquiry into allegations against Justice Yashwant Varma, following the discovery of unaccounted cash at the judge's residence. Dhankhar criticized the lack of a formal First Information Report (FIR) and called for a re-examination of the 1991 *K. Veeraswami v. Union of India* judgment, which mandates prior sanction before prosecuting sitting judges.

Background: The K. Veeraswami Judgment (1991): The *K. Veeraswami* case addressed whether a sitting judge could be prosecuted under the Prevention of Corruption Act without prior approval. The Supreme Court held that judges are "public servants" under the Act but emphasized that any criminal investigation against them requires prior sanction from the Chief Justice of India (CJI). This ruling aimed to protect judicial independence but has been criticized for potentially shielding judges from accountability.

The Justice Yashwant Varma Case

- **Incident:** In March 2025, a fire at Justice Varma's official residence in Delhi led to the discovery of a significant amount of unaccounted cash.
- **In-House Inquiry:** The Supreme Court constituted a three-judge committee to investigate the matter. The committee reportedly found the allegations credible and submitted its findings to the President and Prime Minister.
- **Transfer and Restrictions:** Justice Varma was transferred to the Allahabad High Court, and the Chief Justice of India recommended that he not be assigned judicial work.

Vice President Dhankhar's Critique

- **Questioning Legal Sanctity:** Dhankhar argued that the in-house inquiry lacks constitutional or legal sanctity and is inconsequential without formal legal proceedings.
- **Call for FIR:** He emphasized the need for a formal FIR to initiate a transparent and accountable investigation, questioning why standard legal procedures were not followed.
- **Revisiting Veeraswami Judgment:** Dhankhar called the 1991 judgment a "scaffolding of impunity" and urged its reconsideration to ensure judicial accountability.

Enrolment Drop in Government Schools and PM-POSHAN

In the News: In the 2024–25 academic year, India witnessed a significant decline in student enrolment across government schools in 23 states and Union Territories. This trend has raised concerns about the effectiveness of the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM-POSHAN) scheme, formerly known as the Midday Meal Scheme, which aims to enhance student nutrition and encourage school attendance.

Key Highlights

- **Enrolment Decline:** The Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) report for 2023–24 indicated a drop of approximately 1.5 crore students in total school enrolment compared to the average figures from 2018–19 to 2021–22.
- **States Most Affected:**
 - **Uttar Pradesh:** 21.83 lakh fewer students
 - **Bihar:** 6.14 lakh
 - **Rajasthan:** 5.63 lakh
 - **West Bengal:** 4.01 lakh
 - **Karnataka:** 2 lakh
 - **Assam:** 1.68 lakh
 - **Tamil Nadu:** 1.65 lakh
 - **Delhi:** 1.05 lakh

Reasons for Decline

- **Data Cleansing:** Transition from school-wise to student-wise enrolment tracking, incorporating Aadhaar verification, led to the removal of duplicate or "ghost" entries.
- **Shift to Private Schools:** Post-COVID-19, there has been a migration back to private schools, reversing earlier trends where students moved to government schools during the pandemic.

Impact on PM-POSHAN Scheme

- **Reduced Beneficiaries:** The decline in enrolment has directly affected the number of students availing midday meals. For instance:
 - **Uttar Pradesh:** 5.41 lakh fewer students
 - **Rajasthan:** 3.27 lakh
 - **West Bengal:** 8.04 lakh
 - **Delhi:** 97,000
- **Coverage Gaps:** In Delhi, only 60% of pre-primary, 69% of primary, and 62% of upper-primary students are covered under the scheme, below the national average.

Government Response

- **Ministry of Education's Directive:** States have been asked to investigate the reasons for enrolment decline and submit detailed reports by June 30, 2025.

- **Emphasis on Data Accuracy:** Efforts are being made to ensure accurate student data collection to better **target** beneficiaries and resources.

Konkan Railway to Merge with Indian Railways

In the News: The Maharashtra government has given its consent for the merger of **the Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL)** with Indian Railways, becoming the last of the shareholder states to agree to the proposal. This move aims to resolve the financial and operational constraints that have hindered the growth of KRCL. The merger had already received the consent of other key stakeholders, Karnataka, Goa, and Kerala, and Maharashtra's approval was the final piece needed to proceed.

Key Points

- **Final State Approval:** Maharashtra's recent agreement completes the consensus among the four shareholder states—**Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, and Kerala**—clearing the path for the merger.
- **Financial Constraints:** KRCL has faced financial challenges due to limited revenue streams and increasing infrastructure demands, prompting the need for integration with Indian Railways to access central funding.
- **Conditions for Merger:** Maharashtra's approval is contingent upon two conditions: the retention of the "Konkan Railway" name post-merger and reimbursement of over ₹394 crore contributed by the state during **KRCL's formation in 1990**.
- **Operational Enhancements:** The merger is expected to facilitate infrastructure upgrades, including track doubling and improved passenger amenities, enhancing the overall efficiency and safety of the Konkan Railway network.
- **Strategic Importance:** The **741-kilometer Konkan Railway** line is a vital corridor connecting Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, and Kerala, playing a crucial role in passenger and freight transportation along India's western coast.

Chhattisgarh Encounter: Who Was Basava Raju, Top Maoist Leader Killed in Abujhmad?

In the News: On May 21, 2025, Indian security forces achieved a significant milestone in their counter-insurgency efforts by eliminating Nambala Keshava Rao, widely known as Basava Raju, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

- The 70-year-old leader was killed during a 50-hour-long operation named '**Operation Kagar**' in the dense forests of Abujhmad, Chhattisgarh. This operation also resulted in the deaths of 26 other Maoist insurgents. Basava Raju was considered the topmost leader of the CPI (Maoist) and was instrumental in orchestrating several major attacks against security forces.

Key Points

- **Educational Background:** Basava Raju hailed from Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh and held a B.Tech degree from the Regional Engineering College (now NIT) Warangal. He was actively involved in student politics and was associated with the Radical Students Union during his college years.
- **Rise in Maoist Ranks:** After the resignation of Muppala Lakshmana Rao (alias Ganapathy) in 2018, Basava Raju ascended to the position of General Secretary of the CPI (Maoist), making him the supreme commander of the Maoist movement in India.
- **Mastermind Behind Major Attacks:** He was believed to be the chief strategist behind several deadly attacks, including the 2010 Dantewada massacre where 76 CRPF personnel were killed, and the 2013 Jeeram Ghati ambush that resulted in the deaths of several Congress leaders.
- **Operation Kagar:** The operation that led to his death was meticulously planned, involving electronic surveillance and intelligence inputs from surrendered Maoists. Basava Raju was killed in a second encounter after escaping an initial gunfight, highlighting the strategic depth of the operation.
- **Impact on Maoist Movement:** His death has left the CPI (Maoist) leaderless for the first time in decades, significantly weakening the insurgency. The Central Committee of the group has now shrunk to 18 members, its smallest size ever.
- **Union Home Ministry's Commitment:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah reiterated the government's commitment to eradicating Maoism in Chhattisgarh by March 31, 2026. He described the elimination of Basava Raju as a landmark achievement in the battle to eliminate Naxalism and applauded the brave security forces for this major breakthrough.

PM Modi Inaugurates 103 Amrit Stations Across 18 States Under ₹1,100 Crore Plan

In the News: On May 22, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated 103 redeveloped railway stations across 86 districts in 18 states and Union Territories under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS). The initiative, with an investment exceeding ₹1,100 crore, aims to modernize railway infrastructure and enhance passenger amenities nationwide.

Key Points

- **Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS):** Launched in 2023, ABSS is a long-term program by Indian Railways to redevelop over 1,300 stations in phases, focusing on modern facilities, improved connectivity, and integration of local heritage.
- **Geographical Spread:** The 103 stations inaugurated span 18 states and Union Territories, including Uttar Pradesh (19 stations), Gujarat (18), Maharashtra (15), Tamil Nadu (9), and others.
- **Modern Amenities:** Upgraded stations feature climate-controlled waiting areas, escalators, lifts, digital displays, and eco-friendly designs, enhancing the travel experience for passengers.
- **Cultural Integration:** The redevelopment emphasizes preserving regional architectural styles and cultural elements, making stations symbols of local heritage.
- **Economic Impact:** The modernization is expected to boost regional development, tourism, and economic growth by improving connectivity and infrastructure.

President Murmu Confers 39 Gallantry Awards for Bravery and Valour

In the News: On May 22, 2025, President Droupadi Murmu, the Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces, conferred 39 gallantry awards during the Defence Investiture Ceremony (Phase-I) at Rashtrapati Bhavan. The awards included six Kirti Chakras and 33 Shaurya Chakras, recognizing acts of exceptional courage and devotion to duty by personnel from the Armed Forces, Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), and State/Union Territory Police.

Key Points:

Kirti Chakra

- **Established:** 4 January 1952 as "Ashoka Chakra, Class II"; renamed "Kirti Chakra" on 27 January 1967.
- **Eligibility:** All ranks of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Reserve Forces, Territorial Army, Militia, other lawfully constituted forces, members of the Nursing Services, and civilians of either sex in all walks of life, including members of Police Forces and Central Para-Military Forces.
- **Awarded For:** Conspicuous gallantry other than in the face of the enemy.
- **Design:** A circular silver medal featuring an embossed Ashoka Chakra surrounded by a lotus wreath. The ribbon is green with two vertical orange lines.
- **Monetary Allowance:**
 - **Central Government:** ₹9,000 per month (as of 1 August 2017).
 - **State Governments:** Varying additional benefits; for instance, the Rajasthan government offers ₹1.2 lakh in cash and 25 bighas of irrigated land or ₹2 lakh in lieu of land.
- **Total Recipients:** 487 (as of 2024), including 198 posthumous awards.

Shaurya Chakra

- **Established:** 4 January 1952 as "Ashoka Chakra, Class III"; renamed "Shaurya Chakra" on 27 January 1967.
- **Eligibility:** All ranks of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Reserve Forces, Territorial Army, Militia, other lawfully constituted forces, members of the Nursing Services, and civilians of either sex in all walks of life, including members of Police Forces and Central Para-Military Forces.
- **Awarded For:** Gallantry otherwise than in the face of the enemy.
- **Design:** A circular bronze medal with the Ashoka Chakra in the center, surrounded by a lotus wreath. The ribbon is green divided by three vertical lines.
- **Monetary Allowance:**
 - **Central Government:** ₹6,000 per month (as of 1 August 2017).
 - **State Governments:** Additional benefits vary; for example, the Rajasthan government provides ₹75,000 in cash and 25 bighas of irrigated land or ₹2 lakh in lieu of land.
- **Total Recipients:** 2,122 (as of 2023), including 627 posthumous awards.

Assam Introduces 'Ankita': India's First AI News Anchor in Regional Language

In the News: On May 14, 2025, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma unveiled 'Ankita', India's first AI-powered news anchor delivering official updates in a regional language. Designed to present Assam Cabinet meeting highlights in Assamese, Ankita marks a pioneering step in integrating artificial intelligence into government communication.

Key Points

- **Launch Details:** Ankita made her debut by presenting key decisions from the Assam Cabinet meeting, including the renaming of Dibrugarh Airport after Bhupen Hazarika and the approval of a one-time financial grant for tea garden workers.
- **Technological Features:** The AI anchor exhibits lifelike facial expressions and voice modulation, delivering news in fluent Assamese. This is achieved through advanced natural language processing and machine learning technologies.
- **Public Reception:** The introduction of Ankita has garnered mixed reactions. While many applaud the technological advancement and improved accessibility, others express concerns over potential job displacement for human news presenters.
 - **Broader Context:** Ankita's launch aligns with Assam's ongoing efforts to integrate AI into various sectors, following initiatives like the AI-based teacher 'Iris' introduced in 2024. Nationally, this move reflects a growing trend of employing AI for efficient and inclusive governance

Supreme Court Stays ED's Investigation into Tamil Nadu's TASMAC

In the News: On May 22, 2025, the Supreme Court of India stayed the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) money laundering investigation into the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC), the state-run liquor retailer. The apex court criticized the ED for overreaching its authority, stating that the agency had "crossed all limits" in its probe.

Key Points:

- **Background of the Investigation:** The ED initiated a probe into TASMAC following allegations of a ₹1,000 crore scam involving corruption in liquor shop licenses and overpricing. The agency conducted raids on TASMAC's headquarters in Chennai between March 6 and 8, 2025.
- **Supreme Court's Intervention:** The Tamil Nadu government and TASMAC challenged the ED's actions, arguing that the agency was overstepping its jurisdiction. The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice BR Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih, stayed the ED's investigation, questioning the legality of prosecuting a state-run corporation without a predicate offense.
- **Criticism of ED's Actions:** The court expressed concern over the ED's conduct, stating that the agency was "violating the federal structure" by targeting a state entity. The bench emphasized that while individuals can be prosecuted, initiating criminal proceedings against a corporation like TASMAC without clear evidence is problematic.

Supreme Court Recognizes CAPF as Organised Services, Ensuring Career Progression

In the News: On May 23, 2025, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment declaring that Group A officers of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) are to be recognized as part of the Organised Group A Services (OGAS) for all service-related purposes. This decision aims to address longstanding issues of career stagnation and limited promotion avenues within the CAPFs.

Key Points:

- **Background of the Issue:**
 - CAPF officers have historically faced challenges in career progression due to a significant number of senior positions being filled by Indian Police Service (IPS) officers on deputation.
 - This practice led to delays in promotions, with officers often waiting 25–30 years to attain ranks like Commandant or Deputy Inspector General (DIG), exceeding standard timelines.
- **Supreme Court's Directives:**
 - The Court mandated that Group A officers of CAPFs from batches dating back to 1986 be treated as part of OGAS for all service-related matters.
 - It directed a comprehensive cadre review and restructuring to be completed within six months to facilitate timely promotions.
 - The number of IPS officers on deputation in CAPFs, particularly at the Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) and Inspector General (IG) levels, is to be progressively reduced within two years.
- **Implications for CAPF Officers:**
 - Approximately 13,000 Group A CAPF officers are expected to benefit from this ruling.
 - Officers will now be eligible for Non-Functional Financial Upgradation (NFFU), a system that provides financial benefits even if they are not promoted, as long as a batchmate is promoted in another organization.
- **Government's Response:**

- The Central Government had previously accepted the inclusion of CAPFs in OGAS through a Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) Office Memorandum dated July 12, 2019.
- However, the Supreme Court emphasized that all benefits associated with OGAS status must be extended to CAPF officers and cannot be selectively applied.

INTERNATIONAL

Israel Launches Operation Gideon's Chariots in Gaza

In the News: On May 17, 2025, Israel launched **Operation Gideon's Chariots**, a large-scale ground and aerial offensive in the Gaza Strip aimed at dismantling Hamas's operational capabilities. The move followed the approval of the operation by Israel's Security Cabinet earlier on May 4, 2025, in response to ongoing hostilities and hostage situations resulting from the October 7, 2023 attacks.

- **Objective:** The operation seeks to eliminate Hamas's military and administrative infrastructure, recover hostages held by the group since the 2023 attacks, and assert Israeli control over key regions in Gaza, particularly in the north and south.
- **Scope of Military Action:** The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched widespread ground incursions supported by air and naval assets. Over **670 Hamas targets** have been destroyed, including arms depots, underground tunnels, training camps, and communication centers.
- **Humanitarian Consequences:** The offensive has led to severe humanitarian distress. The Gaza Health Ministry reported over **53,000 deaths** since the conflict began in October 2023. Vital infrastructure such as hospitals, including the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza, has been rendered inoperative due to bombardment.
- **Global Reaction:** The operation has provoked strong international concern. The **United Nations**, humanitarian agencies, and human rights groups have called for a ceasefire and immediate humanitarian access to address the deepening crisis in Gaza.
- **Biblical Allusion:** The name "Gideon's Chariots" references the **biblical figure Gideon**, who led a small, tactically astute force to victory against a larger enemy. The term symbolizes strategic precision and resilience under pressure, aligning with Israel's narrative of fighting a prolonged war against terrorism.

Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir Promoted to Field Marshal: What This Means

In the News: On May 20, 2025, Pakistan's federal cabinet, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, approved the promotion of Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir to the rank of Field Marshal. This elevation marks only the second time in Pakistan's history that an officer has attained this prestigious five-star rank, the first being General Ayub Khan in 1959.

Key Highlights

- **Recognition of Military Leadership:** General Munir's promotion acknowledges his leadership during Pakistan's recent military engagements, notably Operation Bunyanum Marsoos, conducted in response to India's Operation Sindoor.
- **Ceremonial Significance:** The rank of Field Marshal is largely ceremonial in Pakistan, symbolizing extraordinary military service. It does not confer additional operational authority but serves as a testament to the officer's contributions.
- **Historical Context:** General Munir is the second individual to be conferred this rank in Pakistan. The first was General Ayub Khan, who assumed the title in 1959 after becoming the country's president following a military coup.
- **Political Implications:** The promotion may also serve to solidify General Munir's position within the military hierarchy and the broader political landscape, especially amidst ongoing regional tensions.

India's Commitment to UN Peacekeeping

In the News: India reaffirmed its dedication to United Nations peacekeeping by making significant pledges at the 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial held in Berlin. As one of the largest troop-contributing countries, India continues to play a pivotal role in global peace and security efforts.

Key Highlights

- **Major Contributions:** India has participated in 48 of the 69 UN peacekeeping missions, contributing over 200,000 troops to date.
- **Recent Pledges:**
 - Deployment of a Quick Reaction Force company.

- Provision of an armed police or mixed armed police unit.
- Establishment of a women-led Formed Police Unit.
- Formation of a counter-IED/EOD unit, a K-9 unit, and a SWAT police unit.
- **Gender Equality Initiatives:** India has been at the forefront of promoting gender equality in peacekeeping. In 2007, it deployed the first all-women Formed Police Unit to Liberia. More recently, India has continued to support and increase the participation of women in peacekeeping roles.
- **Leadership Roles:** Indian military personnel have held key leadership positions in various UN missions, including Force Commanders and Police Commissioners. Notably, Indian officers have served in missions in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Lebanon.
- **Sacrifices Made:** India has lost 161 peacekeepers in the line of duty, underscoring its commitment and the risks undertaken by its personnel in maintaining global peace.

WHO Adopts First-Ever Global Pandemic Treaty

In the News: On May 20, 2025, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted the world's first international treaty on pandemic preparedness and response during the 78th World Health Assembly in Geneva. The agreement, passed with 124 votes in favor and 11 abstentions, aims to enhance global coordination, equity, and resilience in managing future pandemics.

Key Highlights

- **Purpose of the Treaty:** The treaty seeks to address gaps and inequities revealed during the COVID-19 **pandemic** by strengthening international collaboration, ensuring equitable access to health resources, and enhancing preparedness for future health emergencies.
- **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) System:** A central feature of the treaty is the establishment of the PABS system, which mandates the sharing of pathogen data and equitable distribution of 20% of pandemic-related health products, such as vaccines and diagnostics, with 10% provided free of charge.
- **Equity and Solidarity:** The agreement emphasizes principles of equity, solidarity, transparency, and accountability, aiming to ensure that all countries, regardless of income level, have access to necessary health tools during pandemics.
- **National Sovereignty:** The treaty clarifies that it does not infringe upon national sovereignty, stating that the WHO cannot mandate specific actions such as lockdowns or vaccination requirements within member states.
- **Implementation and Ratification:** The treaty will enter into force once at least 60 countries ratify it. An **annex** detailing the PABS system is to be finalized and adopted in the next World Health Assembly.
- **U.S. Non-Participation:** The United States did not participate in the treaty, having withdrawn from the WHO **under** President Donald Trump. U.S. Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. criticized the agreement, citing concerns over WHO's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and issues of national sovereignty.

Sudan Appoints Kamil Idris as First Prime Minister Since 2023 Civil War

In the News: On May 19, 2025, Sudan's army chief, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, appointed Dr. Kamil Eltayeb Idris as the country's first prime minister since the outbreak of the civil war in April 2023. This appointment aims to establish a transitional government following the military's recent gains against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Key Highlights

- **Background of Kamil Idris:** Dr. Idris is a seasoned diplomat and international civil servant. He served as the **Director** General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) from 1997 to 2008 and was also a member of the United Nations International Law Commission .
- **Role in Transitional Government:** Tasked with forming a technocratic cabinet, Dr. Idris's appointment is seen as a step toward restoring civilian governance in Sudan. His non-partisan background is expected to **facilitate** inclusive consultations aimed at forging peace and stability .
- **International Reactions:** The United Nations Secretary-General expressed hope that this appointment would serve as the first step toward forming a broad-based technocratic government. The African Union also **welcomed** the move, viewing it as progress toward reviving an inclusive political process .

Current Challenges

- **Ongoing Conflict:** Despite the appointment, Sudan continues to grapple with a devastating civil war between the army and the RSF, which began in April 2023. The conflict has resulted in significant loss of life and displacement of civilians .

- **Humanitarian Crisis:** The war has led to widespread hunger and malnutrition, with nearly half of Sudan's population facing severe food insecurity.

Suez Canal Offers 15% Discount to Cargo Ships

In the News: In response to a significant decline in maritime traffic due to security concerns in the Red Sea, the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) announced a 15% discount on transit fees for large container ships. This measure aims to restore confidence among shipping companies and revitalize the canal's usage.

Background: Decline in Canal Traffic

- **Security Concerns:** Since late 2023, attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on commercial vessels in the Red Sea led to significant rerouting of maritime traffic away from the Suez Canal.
- **Revenue Impact:** The canal's revenue dropped from \$10.3 billion in 2023 to \$4 billion in 2024, reflecting the decline in usage.

Discount Details

- **Eligibility:** Container ships with a net tonnage of at least 130,000 metric tons, whether loaded or empty.
- **Duration:** The 15% discount is effective from May 15, 2025, for a period of 90 days.
- **Application:** The discount is automatically applied; no prior application or documentation is required.

Industry Response

- **Cautious Optimism:** While the discount is welcomed, major shipping companies like Maersk remain cautious, citing ongoing security concerns despite a ceasefire between the U.S. and the Houthis.
- **Alternative Routes:** Many shipping lines continue to use the longer Cape of Good Hope route, which, although more costly and time-consuming, is perceived as safer under current conditions.

Golden Dome Missile Defence System – 2025

In the News: In May 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled the "Golden Dome," an ambitious missile defence initiative designed to shield the United States from advanced missile threats, including ballistic, hypersonic, and space-launched weapons. Drawing inspiration from Israel's Iron Dome, the Golden Dome aims to integrate land, sea, and space-based technologies to create a comprehensive defence shield. The project is projected to cost between \$175 billion and \$542 billion, with an initial \$25 billion allocated. General Michael Guetlein of the U.S. Space Force has been appointed to lead the initiative, which aspires to be operational by the end of Trump's term in January 2029.

Key Points

- **Strategic Objectives:** The Golden Dome is intended to protect the U.S. homeland from a spectrum of missile threats, including cruise missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), hypersonic weapons, and fractional orbital bombardment systems (FOBS). The system plans to deploy a network of satellites equipped with sensors and interceptors to detect and neutralize threats during various phases of flight.
- **Technological Framework:** Combining ground-based radars, sea-based interceptors, and space-based assets, the Golden Dome aims for a layered defence strategy to increase interception success rates. The system will incorporate cutting-edge interceptors capable of engaging high-speed and maneuverable targets, addressing the challenges posed by emerging missile technologies.
- **Budget and Funding:** An initial \$25 billion has been approved for the project's commencement, with total costs estimated between \$175 billion and \$542 billion over two decades.
- **International Perspectives:** Canada has expressed interest in participating in the Golden Dome project, potentially enhancing North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) capabilities. China and Russia have criticized the initiative, viewing it as a move that could escalate the militarization of space and disrupt strategic stability.

India Reaffirms Global Health Commitment at 78th World Health Assembly

In the News: At the 78th World Health Assembly held in Geneva in May 2025, India reiterated its dedication to global health equity under the theme "One World for Health." Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava highlighted India's advancements in healthcare, emphasizing initiatives like Ayushman Bharat and the nation's role in promoting equitable access to medical resources. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a video address, underscored the significance of inclusive health reforms and technology-driven solutions in achieving universal health coverage.

Key Points

- **Ayushman Bharat Expansion:** India's flagship health insurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat, now covers over 580 million people, including all citizens above 70 years of age, providing free treatment and financial protection for advanced medical procedures.
- **Digital Health Initiatives:** The establishment of unique digital health identities has facilitated the integration of insurance, medical records, and health benefits. India's free telemedicine service has enabled over 340 million consultations, enhancing healthcare accessibility across the nation.
- **Disease Elimination Efforts:** India has been certified as Trachoma-Free by the WHO and is committed to eliminating diseases such as tuberculosis, leprosy, lymphatic filariasis, measles, rubella, and kala-azar.
- **Support for Pandemic Agreement:** India expressed strong support for a legally binding international framework to enhance global cooperation during health emergencies, emphasizing equitable access to medical countermeasures, transparent data sharing, and technology transfer, particularly for the Global South.
- **Global Collaboration and Equity:** Prime Minister Modi highlighted India's scalable and sustainable health models as solutions for health challenges in developing countries, reaffirming the nation's commitment to sharing best practices and fostering global health equity.

What is the FATF, and Why Does Pakistan Potentially Being Greylisted Matter?

In the News: As of May 2025, India is advocating for Pakistan to be re-added to the FATF Grey List. Indian authorities plan to submit a dossier highlighting Pakistan's alleged non-compliance with FATF standards, particularly concerning terror financing.

- **India's efforts** aim to increase financial pressure on Pakistan and highlight concerns over its handling of terrorism-related issues
- **What is the FATF?:** The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an intergovernmental organization established in **1989** by the G7 to combat money laundering. Following the events of 9/11, its mandate expanded to include countering terrorist financing. Headquartered in Paris, the FATF sets global standards and promotes the effective implementation of legal, regulatory, and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing, and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- **What is the Grey List?:** The FATF maintains two primary lists:
 - **Grey List (Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring):** Countries with strategic deficiencies in their regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing, but which have committed to resolving these issues swiftly.
 - **Blacklist (High-Risk Jurisdictions):** Countries with significant strategic deficiencies in their regimes to counter money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing, and which have not committed to an action plan to address these issues.Being placed on the Grey List indicates that a country is under increased monitoring and is working with the FATF to address identified deficiencies.

Pakistan's History with the FATF

- **2008:** Pakistan was first placed on the FATF Grey List due to deficiencies in its anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist financing (CFT) frameworks.
- **2010:** Removed from the Grey List after demonstrating progress in improving its AML/CFT regime.
- **2012:** Re-listed due to non-compliance with FATF standards.
- **2015:** Removed again after significant improvements.
- **2018:** Placed on the Grey List for the third time for failing to act against terror financing on its soil.
- **2022:** Removed from the Grey List after implementing reforms and demonstrating progress in its AML/CFT framework.

India Welcomes UK's Decision on Chagos Islands Handover

In the News: On May 22, 2025, the United Kingdom and Mauritius finalized a landmark agreement to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius. India has welcomed this development, viewing it as a significant step toward decolonization and the upholding of international law. The agreement allows the UK and the US to retain joint military access to Diego Garcia under a 99-year lease, while Mauritius regains control over the remaining islands.

Key Points

- **India's Support for Decolonization:** India has consistently backed Mauritius's claim over the Chagos Archipelago, aligning with its broader commitment to decolonization and respect for sovereignty.
- **Strategic Importance of Diego Garcia:** While sovereignty over the archipelago is transferred, the UK and US will maintain a military base on Diego Garcia for 99 years, paying Mauritius £101 million annually.
- **International Legal Endorsements:** The agreement follows the 2019 International Court of Justice advisory **opinion** and a subsequent UN General Assembly resolution, both supporting Mauritius's sovereignty over the Chagos Islands.
- **India's Geopolitical Interests:** India's endorsement of the deal also serves to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region, reinforcing India's strategic partnerships and regional stability.
- **Humanitarian Concerns:** Despite the agreement, displaced Chagossians have expressed concerns over their exclusion from the negotiations and uncertainty about their right to return to the islands.

Harvard Sues Trump Administration Over Ban on Enrolling Foreign Students

In the News: On May 23, 2025, Harvard University filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration in response to the revocation of its certification under the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). This action barred Harvard from enrolling new international students and jeopardized the visa status of over 7,000 current international students, who comprise approximately 27% of the university's student body. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) cited Harvard's alleged non-compliance with records requests and concerns over campus safety as reasons for the revocation.

Key Points

- **Legal Grounds:** Harvard's lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court in Massachusetts, argues that the **government's** action violates the First Amendment, the Due Process Clause, and the Administrative Procedure Act. The university contends that the revocation is an unlawful and retaliatory measure aimed at coercing compliance with federal demands.
- **Impact on Students:** The revocation of SEVP certification affects more than 7,000 international students at **Harvard**, placing their academic futures and legal status in jeopardy. These students may be forced to transfer to other institutions or leave the United States.
- **Broader Context:** This lawsuit is part of an escalating conflict between the Trump administration and higher **education** institutions. Prior to this, the administration had frozen over \$2 billion in federal funding to Harvard and threatened to revoke its tax-exempt status, citing concerns over antisemitism and alleged ties to foreign entities.
- **International Repercussions:** The ban has drawn criticism from foreign governments and educational **institutions** worldwide. China, whose nationals represent a significant portion of Harvard's international student population, expressed concern over the potential impact on educational and cultural exchanges.

Algeria Becomes New Member of BRICS' New Development Bank

In the News: On May 19, 2025, Algeria officially joined the New Development Bank (NDB), the financial institution established by the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). This move signifies Algeria's commitment to enhancing its role in global development financing and diversifying its economic partnerships.

Key Points:

- **Membership Confirmation:** Algeria deposited its instrument of accession on May 19, 2025, completing the **formal** process to become a member of the NDB. The announcement was made by the bank's president, Dilma Rousseff, during the NDB's annual meeting.
- **Strategic Significance:** As Africa's leading natural gas exporter, Algeria's inclusion in the NDB is expected to bolster its economic growth and infrastructure development. The membership provides Algeria with access to funding for sustainable development projects and positions it as a key player in the global financial landscape.
- **NDB Overview:** Established in 2015, the NDB aims to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable **development** projects in emerging economies. Headquartered in Shanghai, China, the bank has approved over 120 projects worth \$40 billion, focusing on areas such as clean energy, transportation, and digital infrastructure.
- **Expansion of Membership:** Algeria joins a growing list of NDB members beyond the original BRICS countries, including Bangladesh, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay. This expansion reflects the NDB's commitment to broadening its global reach and fostering inclusive development.

SPORTS

ISRO's 101st Satellite Launch Fails: Recalling the Only Two Other Instances When 'Workhorse' PSLV Failed

In the News: On May 18, 2025, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) faced a significant setback when its 101st mission, involving the launch of the Earth observation satellite EOS-09 aboard the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C61), failed. The launch commenced successfully at 5:59 AM IST from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. However, an anomaly in the third stage of the rocket led to mission failure. ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan reported a drop in chamber pressure during the third stage, preventing the satellite from reaching its intended orbit. A Failure Analysis Committee has been established to investigate the cause of the malfunction.

Key Details:

- **Mission Overview:** The PSLV-C61 mission aimed to deploy EOS-09 (also known as RISAT-1B), a C-band synthetic aperture radar satellite designed for high-resolution Earth imaging under all weather conditions, day or night. The satellite was intended to enhance India's surveillance capabilities and contribute to disaster management and resource monitoring.
- **Cause of Failure:** The first and second stages of the PSLV-C61 performed nominally. However, during the third stage, a drop in chamber pressure was observed, leading to the mission's failure. Preliminary analyses suggest a possible malfunction in the flex nozzle system of the third-stage motor, which is critical for steering during flight.
- **Historical Context:** This incident marks only the third failure in the PSLV's history:
 - *PSLV-D1 (1993):* The inaugural flight failed due to a software error in the guidance and control processor, leading to loss of attitude control and mission failure.
 - *PSLV-C39 (2017):* The mission failed when the payload fairing did not separate, leaving the IRNSS-1H satellite trapped and unable to reach orbit.
- **ISRO's Track Record:** Despite this setback, ISRO's PSLV has a commendable success rate, with 60 successful missions out of 63 launches. The PSLV has been instrumental in deploying satellites for various applications, including navigation, Earth observation, and interplanetary missions.

Joe Root Becomes Fastest to 13,000 Test Runs: A Historic Milestone in Cricket

In the News: On May 22, 2025, during the one-off Test match between England and Zimbabwe at Trent Bridge, Nottingham, England's Joe Root achieved a historic milestone by becoming the fastest player to reach 13,000 runs in Test cricket.

Key Points

- **Historic Achievement:** Joe Root became the first English cricketer and the fifth overall to surpass 13,000 Test runs. He reached this landmark in his 153rd Test match, surpassing the previous record held by South Africa's Jacques Kallis, who achieved it in 159 matches.
- **Elite Company:** Root joins an exclusive group of cricketers who have scored over 13,000 Test runs: Sachin **Tendulkar** (15,921), Ricky Ponting (13,378), Jacques Kallis (13,289), and Rahul Dravid (13,288).
- **Match Context:** Root reached the milestone with a single off Victor Nyauchi in the 80th over of England's first **innings**. Although he was dismissed for 34 runs by Blessing Muzarabani, his contribution was part of England's dominant batting performance, ending the day at 498/3.
- **Career Highlights:** Since his Test debut against India in December 2012, Root has been a mainstay in **England's** batting lineup. He has scored over 2,000 runs against both Australia and India, and more than 1,000 runs against teams like South Africa, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies.
- **Future Prospects:** With 13,000 Test runs to his name, Root is now 2,916 runs short of surpassing Sachin Tendulkar's all-time record of 15,921 Test runs.

ECONOMICS

RBI Transfers Record ₹2.69 Lakh Crore Surplus to Centre for FY25

In the News: On May 23, 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a record surplus transfer of ₹2.69 lakh crore to the Government of India for the financial year 2024–25. This marks a 27% increase over the previous year's transfer of ₹2.11 lakh

crore and surpasses the Union Budget's projection of ₹2.56 lakh crore in dividend receipts from the RBI and public sector financial institutions.

Key Points:

- **Record Surplus Transfer:** The ₹2.69 lakh crore transfer is the highest-ever annual surplus transferred by the RBI to the central government. This substantial payout is expected to significantly bolster the government's fiscal position, providing additional resources for public spending and aiding in achieving the fiscal deficit target of 4.4% for FY25.
- **Revised Economic Capital Framework (ECF):** The surplus transfer was determined based on the revised ECF, which now stipulates a Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) range of 4.5% to 7.5% of the RBI's balance sheet. For FY25, the CRB was set at the upper limit of 7.5%, up from 6.5% in the previous year. This adjustment aims to enhance the RBI's financial resilience amid global and domestic uncertainties.
- **Sources of Increased Surplus:** The significant surplus is attributed to robust earnings from the RBI's foreign exchange operations, including substantial dollar sales to support the rupee, and higher interest income from foreign assets due to elevated global interest rates. The RBI's gross dollar sales surged to \$399 billion in FY25 from \$153 billion in FY24.
- **Impact on Government Finances:** The surplus transfer provides the government with additional fiscal space, potentially allowing for increased capital expenditure or reducing the need for additional borrowing. Analysts suggest that this could lead to a reduction in the fiscal deficit by approximately 20 basis points, bringing it down to around 4.2% of GDP.

RBI Sells Nearly \$400 Billion in FY25

In the News: In the fiscal year 2024–25 (FY25), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) executed a record gross sale of \$398.71 billion in foreign exchange markets. This aggressive intervention aimed to stabilize the Indian rupee amid global economic uncertainties and significant capital outflows.

Key Points:

- **Record Gross Forex Sales:** The RBI's gross foreign exchange sales in FY25 amounted to \$398.71 billion, significantly surpassing the previous records of \$212.57 billion in FY23 and \$153.03 billion in FY24.
- **Net Forex Sales:** Despite substantial purchases, the RBI's net forex sales stood at \$34.51 billion for FY25, marking the highest net sale since the 2008–09 global financial crisis.
- **Peak Monthly Intervention:** December 2024 witnessed the highest monthly intervention, with the RBI selling \$69.05 billion in foreign currency, accounting for approximately 73% of the total annual sales occurring in the latter half of FY25.
- **Impact on Forex Reserves:** India's foreign exchange reserves declined by about \$80 billion between late September 2024 and mid-January 2025, dropping below \$625 billion, reflecting the cost of defending the rupee.
- **Rupee Depreciation:** The Indian rupee reached an all-time low of ₹87.95 per U.S. dollar in February 2025, prompting the RBI's intensified market interventions.
- **Forward Book Reduction:** The RBI reduced its forward dollar position to \$84.34 billion by March 31, 2025, down from \$88.75 billion in February, indicating a strategic move to manage future currency obligations.

Bitcoin Hits \$110K as GENIUS Act Boosts Crypto Confidence

In the News: On May 22, 2025, Bitcoin surged past the \$110,000 mark, reaching an all-time high of \$111,816. This significant milestone is attributed to growing investor optimism fueled by the U.S. Senate's advancement of the Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for U.S. Stablecoins (GENIUS) Act, which aims to provide a comprehensive regulatory framework for stablecoins.

Key Points:

- **GENIUS Act Overview:**
 - The GENIUS Act seeks to establish clear regulations for stablecoins, including requirements for issuers to hold reserves of underlying assets, adhere to anti-money laundering protocols, and prioritize consumer protections in bankruptcy scenarios.
 - The bill passed a Senate procedural vote with a 66–32 margin and is expected to proceed to a full vote post-Memorial Day recess.
- **Market Impact:**
 - Bitcoin's price increase of over 33% in the past month is linked to institutional investments and ETF inflows, which exceeded \$3.6 billion in May.

- Analysts project that the stablecoin market could expand from its current \$248 billion to \$2.5 trillion by 2030, driven by the regulatory clarity provided by the GENIUS Act.
- **Political Context:**
 - While the GENIUS Act enjoys bipartisan support, some lawmakers express concerns over potential conflicts of interest, citing President Trump's involvement in crypto ventures like the "USD1" stablecoin and the "TrumpCoin" meme token.
 - Senator Elizabeth Warren has criticized the bill, warning that it could enable self-dealing and corruption within the crypto industry.

ENVIRONMENT

Asiatic Lion Population Surge in Gujarat

In the News: Gujarat has recorded a remarkable increase in its Asiatic lion population, reaching 891 individuals in 2025, up from 674 in 2020—a 32% rise over five years. This growth, announced during the 16th Asiatic Lion Census, reflects the success of conservation efforts like Project Lion and highlights the species' expanding presence beyond traditional habitats.

Key Points:

- **Population Growth:** The Asiatic lion population in Gujarat increased by 32% from 674 in 2020 to 891 in 2025. This marks a 70% rise since 2015, when the count was 523, and a 119% increase since 2010.
- **Expanded Habitat Range:** Over half of the lions (507 individuals) now reside outside traditional protected areas like Gir National Park, indicating successful territorial expansion. Lions have been spotted in 58 talukas across 11 districts, including new areas such as Barda Sanctuary and coastal regions.
- **Demographic Details:** The 2025 census recorded 196 adult males, 330 adult females, 140 sub-adults, and 225 cubs. The increase in adult females suggests a strong potential for continued population growth.
- **Conservation Efforts:** Initiatives like Project Lion have focused on habitat restoration, strengthening the prey base, and mitigating human-wildlife conflicts, contributing to the population surge. : The census involved around 3,000 participants and covered 35,000 square kilometers over four days.
- **Ongoing Challenges:** Between 2020 and 2024, 669 lion deaths were recorded, with 57 attributed to unnatural causes, highlighting the need for continued conservation vigilance. Experts emphasize the importance of expanding quality forest habitats to ensure the long-term survival of the species.

Tamil Nadu Records 397 Wetland and 401 Terrestrial Bird Species in 2025 Synchronised Survey

In the News: In March 2025, Tamil Nadu conducted its annual Synchronised Bird Census, revealing a total of 7.85 lakh birds across 798 species. The survey documented 5.52 lakh wetland birds from 397 species and 2.32 lakh terrestrial birds from 401 species, highlighting the state's rich avian biodiversity.

Key Points

- **Survey Overview:** The census was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 on March 8–9 covered 934 wetlands across all 38 districts, while Phase 2 on March 15–16 surveyed 1,093 terrestrial sites, including urban parks, rural landscapes, and protected areas.
- **Migratory Birds:** The survey recorded 1,13,606 migratory birds from 136 species, underscoring Tamil Nadu's role as a critical stopover along the Central Asian Flyway. Notable migratory species included the Greater Flamingo, Greylag Goose, Eurasian Curlew, and Pied Avocet.
- **Resident Species:** Common resident wetland birds observed were the Little Egret, Little Cormorant, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, and Indian Pond Heron. Terrestrial areas frequently hosted species like the House Crow, Common Myna, Rose-ringed Parakeet, and Indian Peafowl.
- **Endangered and Nocturnal Birds:** The census documented 26 of the 37 endangered bird species known in Tamil Nadu, along with 17 nocturnal species, reflecting the survey's comprehensive methodology and focus on conservation priorities.
- **Habitat Distribution:** Approximately 49% of the wetland bird population was recorded in coastal districts, highlighting the ecological richness of these regions.
- **Conservation Initiatives:** In response to the findings, the Forest Department announced plans to implement year-round bird monitoring with increased community participation to enhance data collection and conservation awareness.

SCIENCE & TECH

NASA's GRAIL Mission: Mapping the Moon's Gravity

In the News: NASA's Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory (GRAIL) mission, launched on September 10, 2011, successfully concluded on December 17, 2012. The mission involved twin spacecraft, Ebb and Flow, orbiting the Moon to map its gravitational field with unprecedented precision, enhancing our understanding of the Moon's internal structure and geological history.

Key Highlights:

- **Mission Overview:** GRAIL consisted of two identical spacecraft, Ebb and Flow, flying in tandem around the Moon to measure variations in its gravitational field. This data aimed to reveal details about the Moon's internal composition, including its crust, mantle, and core.
- **Scientific Achievements:** The mission produced the highest-resolution gravity map of any celestial body to date. It discovered that the lunar crust is thinner and more fractured than previously thought, suggesting a history of heavy bombardment. GRAIL also identified long, linear features interpreted as ancient dike intrusions, indicating past volcanic activity.
- **Mission Timeline:** Ebb entered lunar orbit on December 31, 2011, followed by Flow on January 1, 2012. The primary science phase lasted from March 7 to May 29, 2012, with an extended mission phase from August 30 to December 17, 2012. Both spacecraft were intentionally crashed into the Moon on December 17, 2012, concluding the mission.
- **Educational Outreach:** The mission included the MoonKAM program, led by Dr. Sally Ride, which allowed middle school students to request images of the lunar surface, fostering interest in lunar science and exploration.

AWARDS & HONOURS

World Food Prize 2025

In the News: On May 13, 2025, Brazilian microbiologist Dr. Mariangela Hungria was announced as the recipient of the 2025 World Food Prize. The award recognizes her pioneering work in developing sustainable agricultural practices through biological nitrogen fixation, significantly enhancing crop yields and reducing reliance on chemical fertilizers in Brazil.

Key Highlights

- **Laureate:** Dr. Mariangela Hungria, a senior researcher at the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa).
- **Award Significance:** Often referred to as the "Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture," the World Food Prize honors individuals who have made exceptional contributions to improving the quality, quantity, or availability of food globally.
- **Scientific Contributions:**
 - Over a 40-year career, Dr. Hungria developed biological seed and soil treatments that utilize symbiotic soil bacteria, such as rhizobia and *Azospirillum brasilense*, to enhance nitrogen fixation in crops.
 - Her innovations have been applied across more than 40 million hectares in Brazil, leading to increased yields of soybeans, maize, wheat, rice, and beans.
- **Economic and Environmental Impact:**
 - The adoption of her biological treatments has enabled Brazilian farmers to save up to \$40 billion annually in fertilizer costs.
 - These practices have also prevented over 180 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent emissions each year, contributing to more sustainable farming methods.
- **Transformation of Brazilian Agriculture:**
 - Dr. Hungria's work has been instrumental in transforming Brazil into the world's largest producer and exporter of soybeans, with production increasing from approximately 15 million metric tons in the 1980s to over 170 million tons today.
- **Award Ceremony:** The \$500,000 prize will be formally presented to Dr. Hungria at the World Food Prize Award Ceremony in October 2025 in Des Moines, Iowa.

International Booker Prize 2025

In the News: On May 20, 2025, *Heart Lamp*, a collection of short stories by Indian author Banu Mushtaq, translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhashti, was awarded the International Booker Prize. This marks the first time a short story collection and a work originally written in Kannada have received this prestigious honor.

Key Highlights

- **Award-Winning Work:** *Heart Lamp* comprises 12 stories that delve into the lives of women and girls in patriarchal communities of southern India. The narratives, spanning over three decades, address themes such as reproductive rights, caste, faith, and power.
- **Author and Translator:**
 - **Banu Mushtaq:** A lawyer, women's rights activist, and writer from Karnataka, India. Her work is rooted in the Bandaya Sahitya movement, known for its protest literature.
 - **Deepa Bhashti:** A writer and translator based in Kodagu, India. Her translation approach, described as "translating with an accent," aims to preserve the cultural richness of the original Kannada text.
- **Prize Details:** The International Booker Prize includes a monetary award of £50,000, shared equally between the author and translator.
- **Judging Panel:** Chaired by author Max Porter, the panel unanimously selected *Heart Lamp* for its radical use of language and emotional depth.
- **Publisher:** The book was published by And Other Stories, marking the independent UK publisher's first **Booker** Prize win.
- **Significance:** This win highlights the global recognition of regional Indian literature and the importance of **translation** in bringing diverse voices to a wider audience.

REPORT AND INDICES

India's Press Freedom Ranking in 2025

In the News: India's press freedom ranking has improved in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, moving up eight places to 151st out of 180 countries, compared to 159th in 2024. This annual index is compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and assesses the level of press freedom enjoyed by journalists and media in various countries.

India's 2025 Ranking and Score

- **Rank:** 151 out of 180 countries (up from 159 in 2024).
- **Global Score:** 32.96.
- This improvement is attributed to slight enhancements in India's press freedom environment and the deterioration of press freedom in other countries.

Global Press Freedom Landscape

- The 2025 index highlights that, for the first time, conditions for journalists are considered "bad" in 50% of the countries evaluated.
- Economic fragility is identified as a leading threat to press freedom globally, with financial pressures undermining the viability of independent journalism.

India's Media Environment

- India boasts a vibrant media landscape with nearly 900 television channels and over 140,000 publications.
- Despite the numerical strength, challenges persist, including political influence over media, economic pressures, and legal constraints that impact journalistic freedom.

Concerns Highlighted in the Report

- The RSF report raises concerns about the concentration of media ownership in India, which can lead to a lack of diversity in viewpoints and increased self-censorship among journalists.
- Legal intimidation and the use of laws to suppress critical reporting are also noted as significant issues affecting press freedom in the country.

Top and Bottom Rankings in 2025

- **Top 3 Countries:** Norway, Estonia, and the Netherlands continue to lead the index, benefiting from strong legal protections and a diverse media landscape.
- **Bottom 3 Countries:** Eritrea ranks last, followed by North Korea and China, where severe restrictions on press freedom are prevalent.

