Weekly Current Affairs 18th October to 24th October 2026

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NATIONAL

CJI Surya Kant to inaugurate Ladakh's first High Court Bench in Leh

In the News: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant inaugurated the first High Court Bench in Ladakh at Leh on October 18, 2026. The Bench forms part of the High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh and will begin regular hearings on October 21, 2026. The initiative aims to improve access to justice for residents of Ladakh, particularly those living in remote areas.

Key Points:

- **First Bench:** The new High Court Bench is located at Melongthang in Leh, approximately 3,500 metres above sea level. It is India's highest-altitude High Court Bench and will provide judicial services within the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- **Constitutional Background:** Ladakh became a Union Territory on October 31, 2019, following the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. It shares a common High Court with Jammu and Kashmir rather than having a separate High Court.
- **Legal Framework:** President Droupadi Murmu promulgated a regulation on August 28, 2026, enabling the establishment of a permanent High Court Bench in Leh. The arrangement expands judicial infrastructure without establishing an independent High Court for Ladakh.
- **Judicial Proceedings:** Regular hearings are scheduled to commence on October 21, 2026. Chief Justice Pushpendra Singh Bhati and Justice Sanjay Parihar are expected to constitute the initial Division Bench, alongside arrangements for Single Bench hearings.
- **Access to Justice:** The Bench will reduce the need for litigants to travel to Jammu or Srinagar for High Court proceedings. It will lower travel expenses, improve access during difficult Himalayan weather conditions and strengthen judicial services in Ladakh.

Tiger Shroff firing: Why Mumbai Police can't get custody of Lawrence and Anmol Bishnoi

In the News: Following a firing incident targeting actor Tiger Shroff in Mumbai's Juhu area in October 2026, attention turned to legal restrictions preventing Mumbai Police from obtaining physical custody of Lawrence Bishnoi and his brother Anmol Bishnoi. Both are lodged in separate prisons and are subject to Union Home Ministry orders restricting their removal from jail.

Key Points:

- **Background of the Incident:** Mumbai Police are investigating allegations linking the Lawrence Bishnoi gang to the firing incident involving Tiger Shroff. Lawrence is lodged in Sabarmati Central Jail, Gujarat, while Anmol is lodged in Tihar Jail, Delhi. Neither brother had been named as an accused in the Tiger Shroff case at the time of the report.
- **Legal Provision:** Section 303 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, empowers the government to prohibit the removal of specified prisoners from jail. It corresponds to Section 268 of the former Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- **Home Ministry Orders:** The Ministry of Home Affairs first restricted Lawrence Bishnoi's removal from prison in August 2023, with subsequent extensions. A similar order was issued for Anmol Bishnoi on December 5, 2025, following his deportation from the United States.
- **Grounds for Restriction:** Section 303 permits such orders after considering the nature of the offence, the possibility of public disorder arising from a prisoner's movement and the broader public interest. While an order remains effective, a court's production order does not require the prisoner's removal.
- **Effect on Investigation:** Investigating agencies may seek judicial permission to question the accused inside prison, but obtaining physical custody remains restricted. Mumbai Police cited these orders during proceedings concerning the 2024 murder of former Maharashtra minister Baba Siddique.

Kolkata Durga Puja stampede toll rises to 19; sitting HC judge to probe incident

In the News: The death toll from a stampede at the Chorbagan Sarbojanin Durga Puja pandal in north Kolkata rose to 19, with at least 25 people injured. The incident occurred on October 17, 2026, during Maha Saptami celebrations. West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari announced plans for an investigation headed by a sitting Calcutta High Court judge, subject to judicial approval.

Key Points:

- **Location and Casualties:** The stampede occurred at the Chorbagan Sarbojanin Durga Puja pandal near Girish Park in north Kolkata. At least 19 people lost their lives, while 25 others sustained injuries. The injured were admitted to hospitals, including Kolkata Medical College and Hospital.
- **Causes of the Stampede:** Preliminary reports identified overcrowding, narrow approach roads, inadequate exits and poor crowd management as contributing factors. Heavy rainfall and announcements by organisers reportedly intensified panic among devotees.
- **Judicial Investigation:** Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari proposed a high-powered investigation committee headed by a sitting Calcutta High Court judge. The state Chief Secretary was directed to seek the Chief Justice's approval for the arrangement. The findings are expected to be made public after the investigation.
- **Police Action:** Seven people associated with the event's organisation and security arrangements were arrested. The case includes provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, relating to culpable homicide and common intention. Investigators are examining alleged negligence and crowd-control failures.
- **Compensation and Safety Measures:** The West Bengal government announced compensation of ₹25 lakh for each deceased person's family. The Centre announced ₹2 lakh for the next of kin of each deceased person and ₹50,000 for those injured. Authorities also ordered safety inspections of Durga Puja pandals, focusing on entry and exit arrangements, emergency access and fire safety

Internet access as a fundamental right for children: What the Supreme Court ruling means

In the News: The Supreme Court recognised that the fundamental right to access and use the internet extends to children, irrespective of age. A Bench comprising Justices J. B. Pardiwala and K. Vinod Chandran cautioned against blanket restrictions on children's internet access. The ruling emerged during proceedings concerning online child sexual exploitation and abuse material.

Key Points:

- **Supreme Court Observation:** The Court held that children possess constitutional rights to access information and use the internet. It observed that protecting children from online harm does not require denying them internet access altogether. The ruling emphasised targeted safeguards rather than blanket age-based bans.
- **Constitutional Provisions:** Article 19(1)(a) guarantees freedom of speech and expression, while Article 21 protects life and personal liberty. The Court recognised internet access as an important means of exercising constitutional rights, including access to education, information and communication.
- **Earlier Judgments:** In Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020), the Supreme Court recognised constitutional protection for expression and business activities through the internet. In Pragya Prasun v. Union of India (2025), it recognised digital access as an intrinsic component of the right to life under Article 21.
- **Restrictions and Proportionality:** The Court held that restrictions affecting fundamental rights must have a lawful basis, pursue a legitimate objective and satisfy proportionality requirements. It warned that blanket restrictions could expose children to unregulated online spaces and create privacy concerns through excessive age verification.
- **Child Protection Measures:** The Court suggested parental-consent mechanisms, child-mode settings, private-by-default accounts and stronger controls against harmful content. It also directed measures to improve the detection and removal of child sexual exploitation material. The Union government must report compliance before the next hearing scheduled for December 10, 2026.

Dussehra and UNESCO: Ramlila, Durga Puja, Garba and India's Intangible Cultural Heritage

In the News: Dussehra, also known as Vijayadashami, was celebrated across India on October 20, 2026, while some regional observances of Bijoya Dashami fell on October 21. The festival brought attention to India's cultural traditions recognised by UNESCO. Ramlila, Durga Puja in Kolkata and Garba of Gujarat are included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Key Points:

- **About Dussehra:** Dussehra is celebrated on the tenth day of the Hindu month of Ashwin, marking the conclusion of Navratri. It commemorates Lord Rama's victory over Ravana and Goddess Durga's victory over Mahishasura. Celebrations include Ramlila performances, Ravana Dahan, processions and regional religious ceremonies.
- **Ramlila and UNESCO Recognition:** Ramlila, the traditional performance of the Ramayana, was proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005. It was subsequently inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008, following the replacement of the earlier Masterpieces proclamation system. Prominent Ramlila traditions are associated with Ayodhya, Ramnagar, Varanasi and other northern Indian locations.
- **Durga Puja in Kolkata:** UNESCO inscribed Durga Puja in Kolkata on its Representative List in 2021. The festival is associated with West Bengal and includes artistic pandals, traditional clay idols, religious ceremonies and community celebrations. The festivities conclude with Vijaya Dashami and the immersion of Durga idols.
- **Garba of Gujarat:** Garba of Gujarat was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List in 2023. It is a traditional dance performed during Navratri in honour of the feminine divine. Participants perform rhythmic circular movements, often around a lamp or an image representing the goddess.
- **UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage:** UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, and India ratified it in 2005. The Representative List recognises living traditions, performing arts, rituals and traditional knowledge. India has 16 inscribed elements, including Deepavali, added in 2025. Dussehra itself is not separately inscribed.

Three Indian Sites Join UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List

In the News: Three Indian sites were added to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, bringing India's total to 81 tentative sites. The additions include two geological sites in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and one archaeological landscape in Chhattisgarh. These sites may be considered for future nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Key Points:

- **Newly Added Sites:** The three sites are the Karst-Mud-Volcano Complex of Baratang, Andaman Subduction Volcanoes, and Sirpur Cultural and Archaeological Landscape. All three were added to the Tentative List on September 28, 2026.
- **Baratang Mud Volcanoes**: Located in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Baratang is known for its mud volcanoes and limestone karst formations. Mud volcanoes release mud, gases and water through geological processes rather than molten lava.
- **Andaman Subduction Volcanoes:** The Andaman region lies along an active tectonic boundary where the Indian Plate descends beneath the Burma microplate. Barren Island, part of the Andaman volcanic arc, is India's only historically active volcano.
- **Sirpur Archaeological Landscape:** Located in Mahasamund district, Chhattisgarh, Sirpur was an important historical centre of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain traditions. Its monuments include the Lakshman Temple, known for its brick architecture.
- **UNESCO Tentative List:** A Tentative List is an inventory of properties that a country may nominate for World Heritage status. Inclusion does not constitute final inscription. The World Heritage Committee decides inscriptions under the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

WWF-India EIACP Launches Green Diwali Campaign 2026

In the News: WWF-India's Environmental Information, Awareness, Capacity Building and Livelihood Programme (EIACP) launched a nationwide Green Diwali Campaign. Running until November 8, 2026, the initiative encourages cracker-free celebrations, waste reduction and environmentally responsible practices under Mission LiFE.

Key Points:

- **Campaign Duration and Organisation:** The campaign runs from October 20 to November 8, 2026, through WWF-India's EIACP Programme Centre–Resource Partner. It is supported by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Green Diwali Pledge:** Citizens are encouraged to avoid firecrackers, use traditional diyas and energy-efficient lighting, reduce single-use plastics, segregate waste and purchase locally manufactured products.
- **National Clean Air Programme:** The campaign focuses particularly on the 130 cities covered under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). NCAP was launched in 2019 to address air pollution through coordinated national, state and city-level action.
- **Mission LiFE:** Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in October 2022 at Kevadia, Gujarat. It promotes environmentally sustainable individual and community behaviour.
- **Public Participation:** The campaign targets schools, colleges, residential welfare associations and local communities. Its awareness activities focus on firecracker-related air pollution, noise pollution and responsible waste management during Diwali.

CCPA Acts Against Online Sale of Regulated Explosives

In the News: The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) announced regulatory action against the unauthorised online listing and sale of hazardous explosive substances. Following its intervention, 3,940 sellers were delisted from seven online platforms, strengthening enforcement of consumer safety and explosives regulations.

Key Points:

- **Regulatory Authority:** The CCPA was established under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, and functions under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution. It protects consumer rights and addresses unfair trade practices and misleading advertisements.
- **Regulated Substances:** The investigation covered substances such as Ammonium Nitrate, Gun Powder, Picric Acid and Pentaerythritol Tetranitrate (PETN). Their sale and handling are subject to applicable licensing and safety regulations.
- **Legal Provisions:** The action involved the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, Explosives Act, 1884, and Ammonium Nitrate Rules, 2012.
- **Enforcement Measures**: Following CCPA intervention, 3,940 sellers were delisted across seven platforms. The authority also coordinated with the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), which regulates explosives and specified hazardous substances in India.
- **Consumer Reporting Mechanism:** Consumers can report online sales of explosives through the National Consumer Helpline number 1915. The helpline operates under the Department of Consumer Affairs and assists consumers with grievances.

SBI data breach: Personal data of nearly 4,000 exposed, how major is the incident?

In the News: The State Bank of India (SBI) reported a cybersecurity incident involving the exposure of 3,897 customer records on the dark web. The compromised information reportedly included personal identification and loan-related details. SBI initiated an independent cybersecurity investigation and stated that its core banking operations were not materially affected.

Key Points:

- **Extent of Data Exposure:** The reported breach involved 3,897 customer records, including names, mobile numbers, dates of birth, email addresses, residential addresses and customer identifiers. Loan-related information was also reportedly exposed.
- **Bank's Response:** SBI initiated an investigation through an independent cybersecurity agency to determine the extent and cause of the incident. The bank indicated that its core business operations, financial performance and continuity were not expected to face a significant impact.

- **CERT-In:** The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is India's national agency for responding to cybersecurity incidents. It operates under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and derives statutory recognition from Section 70B of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- **Digital Personal Data Protection Framework:** The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, establishes a framework for processing digital personal data and protecting individuals' rights. Its applicability to particular incidents depends on the commencement of relevant provisions and rules.
- **SBI Background:** The State Bank of India was constituted on July 1, 1955, following the transformation of the Imperial Bank of India under the State Bank of India Act, 1955. Its headquarters is in Mumbai, and it is India's largest public-sector bank.

Ramesh Chand Committee on Sugarcane Farmers' Issues

In the News: The Union Government constituted a committee chaired by Professor Ramesh Chand, former Member of NITI Aayog, to examine issues concerning sugarcane farmers and the sugar industry. The committee was formed following discussions with sugarcane farmers from Karnataka and Maharashtra. It will examine farmers' remuneration, sugar pricing, recovery assessment and sugarcane weighment practices.

Key Points:

- **Committee Formation:** The committee is chaired by agricultural economist Professor Ramesh Chand, who served as a Member of NITI Aayog from 2015 to 2026. He was previously associated with the ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research and the Fifteenth Finance Commission.
- **Sugarcane Pricing Issues:** The committee will examine demands for higher remunerative returns to sugarcane farmers, considering cultivation costs and other relevant factors. It will also review the ex-mill Minimum Selling Price (MSP) of sugar in relation to production costs, market prices and the financial viability of sugar mills.
- **Sugar Recovery Assessment:** The committee will review existing mechanisms for measuring and reporting sugar recovery from sugarcane. It will recommend measures for transparent verification of recovery percentages, which influence the assessment of sugar production and farmers' payments.
- **Weighment and Harvesting Practices:** The committee will examine sugarcane weighing systems, including calibration, inspection and verification mechanisms at sugar mills. It will also assess deductions made for mechanically harvested sugarcane and their financial impact on the amount payable to farmers.
- **Committee Members and Consultation:** Members include the Agriculture Commissioner, Joint Secretary (Sugar) and Joint Secretary (Legal Metrology). The committee will consult farmers' representatives, sugar mill associations, State Governments and other stakeholders before submitting its recommendations to the competent authority.

SBI data breach: Personal data of nearly 4,000 exposed, how major is the incident?

In the News: The State Bank of India (SBI) disclosed a suspected data breach involving the personal information of 3,897 customers. The records were identified among approximately 3.75 lakh records found on the dark web. SBI initiated an investigation to determine the authenticity, source and extent of the exposure and stated that its core banking operations remained unaffected.

Key Points:

- **Details of the Incident:** SBI received alerts on October 16, 2026, from its threat intelligence service provider, the Defence Cyber Agency and the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In). Preliminary examination identified 3,897 records containing personally identifiable information among approximately 3,75,000 records available on the dark web.
- **Information Exposed:** The affected records included customer names, registered mobile numbers, dates of birth, gender, email addresses and residential addresses. Some records also contained branch details, Customer Information File (CIF) identifiers, lead IDs and information associated with loan records.
- **Investigation and Response:** SBI activated its cybersecurity incident response and containment protocols following the alerts. It also engaged an independent CERT-In-empanelled cybersecurity agency to investigate the suspected compromise, assess risks and recommend corrective measures.

- **Impact on Banking Operations:** SBI stated that the incident had no material impact on its core business operations, financial performance or business continuity. However, the authenticity and full extent of the exposed information remained under investigation at the time of disclosure.
- **Cybersecurity Framework:** CERT-In operates under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and serves as India's national agency for responding to cybersecurity incidents. The incident also raises issues concerning customer-data protection under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and the cybersecurity obligations of financial institutions.

India Hosts 7th Agrivoltaics World Conference 2026 in New Delhi

In the News: The 7th AgriVoltaics World Conference (AWC) 2026 was held from October 21 to 23, 2026, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. Organised under the theme "Powering the Global South," the conference marked the first time this international event was hosted in the Global South. It focused on integrating solar power generation with agricultural production to strengthen food security, renewable energy adoption and farmers' livelihoods.

Key Points:

- **Conference Organisation:** The conference was hosted by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Government of India, with support from Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKM). It was organised in partnership with Conexio-PSE and brought together researchers, policymakers, farmers and renewable energy experts.
- **Concept of Agrivoltaics:** Agrivoltaics refers to the simultaneous use of agricultural land for crop cultivation and solar electricity generation. Solar photovoltaic panels are installed in arrangements that permit farming activities beneath or between them. The technology can improve land-use efficiency, provide supplementary agricultural income and support climate-resilient farming practices.
- **Government Initiatives:** Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan emphasised developing agrivoltaic systems suitable for small and marginal farmers. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is expected to collaborate with MNRE on research and technology adoption. Particular emphasis was placed on crop-specific solutions suited to India's 15 agro-climatic zones.
- **Knowledge Resources Launched:** Three knowledge resources were introduced at the conference: the Decision-Making Tool developed by the India Agrivoltaics Alliance, the Book of Abstracts prepared by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and MNRE's AgriPV Policy Handbook. These resources are intended to support research, policy formulation and practical implementation of agrivoltaic systems.
- **Participation and Innovation:** The conference attracted more than 1,200 delegates, including over 150 international participants. It included scientific discussions, an India-focused track and an AgriVoltaics Pitch Hub for startups and innovators. The event promoted the transformation of farmers from food producers, or Annadatas, into renewable energy producers, or Urjadatas.

Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) Raising Day 2026: History, Roles and Key Facts

In the News: The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) celebrated its 65th Raising Day on October 24, 2026, commemorating its establishment in 1962. Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended greetings to ITBP personnel, popularly known as Himveers, and praised their courage, determination and sacrifices. The occasion highlighted the force's contribution to border security and disaster response in the Himalayan region.

Key Points:

- **Establishment and History:** The ITBP was established on October 24, 1962, following the Sino-Indian War, to strengthen India's northern frontier security. Initially raised with four battalions under the CRPF Act, it later received an independent legal framework through the Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force Act, 1992, followed by rules in 1994.
- **Border Guarding Responsibilities:** The ITBP guards approximately 3,488 km of the India-China border, extending from Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh. Under the One Border One Force arrangement, the entire India-China border was assigned to the ITBP in 2004.

- **Administrative Control and Motto:** The ITBP is one of India's Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Its motto is "Shaurya, Dridhata, Karma Nishtha", meaning Valour, Determination and Devotion to Duty. Personnel are popularly called Himveers because of their high-altitude service.
- **Operational Roles:** Apart from border surveillance and preventing trans-border crimes, the ITBP performs counter-insurgency, internal security and protection duties. It also conducts rescue operations during Himalayan natural disasters and deploys personnel trained in mountaineering, skiing and high-altitude survival.
- **High-Altitude Deployment:** ITBP border outposts are located at altitudes ranging approximately from 9,000 to 18,800 feet, where winter temperatures may fall to minus 45°C. Its personnel undergo specialised training to operate in extreme climatic conditions, making it a major component of India's high-altitude border security architecture.

Green Diwali Campaign 2026

In the News: WWF-India's Environmental Information, Awareness, Capacity Building and Livelihood Programme (EIACP) launched a nationwide Green Diwali Campaign on October 20, 2026. Supported by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the campaign will continue until November 8, 2026. It promotes firecracker-free celebrations and environmentally responsible practices under Mission LiFE, focusing particularly on 130 cities covered by the National Clean Air Programme.

Key Points:

- **Organising Institution**: The campaign was launched by WWF-India's EIACP Programme Centre–Resource Partner (PC-RP) with support from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. It seeks to mobilise schools, colleges, resident welfare associations and local communities for environmentally sustainable Diwali celebrations.
- **Green Diwali Pledge:** Citizens are encouraged to avoid firecrackers, use traditional earthen lamps and energy-efficient lighting, reduce single-use plastic and segregate household waste. Participants are also encouraged to motivate family members and neighbours to adopt sustainable practices and support locally manufactured products.
- **National Clean Air Programme:** Launched in January 2019 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, NCAP covers 130 cities across 24 States and Union Territories. Its revised objective was to achieve up to 40% reduction in PM10 concentrations or meet the national annual PM10 standard of 60 $\mu g/m^3$ by 2025–26.
- **Mission LiFE:** Mission LiFE stands for Lifestyle for Environment and promotes sustainable lifestyles through individual and collective behavioural changes. The concept was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, while the mission was formally launched in October 2022.
- **Public Participation and Monitoring:** The campaign encourages citizens to participate in WWF-India's Carbon Footprint Survey to assess the environmental impact of daily activities. Participating institutions can document pledge drives and awareness activities by submitting participant numbers, geo-tagged photographs and brief activity reports.

INTERNATIONAL

History of Student Protests in France: From the French Revolution of 1789 to the 2026 Unrest

In the News: France witnessed widespread demonstrations in October 2026, initially driven by student concerns over deteriorating school conditions and inadequate public services. The protests expanded into nationwide demonstrations over rising living costs and economic inequality. The unrest renewed attention to France's long history of revolutionary movements, student activism and mass public protests.

Key Points:

- **French Revolution of 1789:** The French Revolution began in 1789 against the absolute monarchy, social inequality and economic hardship. The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, became a major revolutionary event. Although it was not specifically a student-led movement, the Revolution established an enduring tradition of mass political mobilisation in France.
- **May 1968 Student Movement:** Student demonstrations began at the University of Nanterre and spread to the Sorbonne in Paris. Protests against university conditions, social restrictions and government authority developed into

nationwide strikes involving millions of workers. The movement became a defining episode in modern French political and social history.

- **Student Protests of 1986:** French students protested against proposed higher-education reforms associated with Minister Alain Devaquet. The demonstrations intensified after the death of student Malik Oussekine following police violence. The French government subsequently withdrew the proposed reforms, marking a significant victory for student mobilisation.
- **Major Protest Movements:** In 2006, students and trade unions protested against the First Employment Contract, leading to its withdrawal. The Yellow Vest movement began in 2018 over fuel taxes and living costs. Large demonstrations also occurred in 2023 against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms.
- **France's 2026 Unrest:** Student demonstrations over underfunded schools, overcrowding and deteriorating educational facilities expanded into broader protests over living costs and public services. Nationwide rallies on October 17 attracted hundreds of thousands of participants. Violent clashes, property damage and arrests occurred alongside largely peaceful demonstrations, prompting heightened security measures.

Global Hunger Index 2026: India Ranks 100th Among 122 Countries

In the News: The Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2026, released in October around World Food Day (October 16), ranked India 100th among 122 countries with sufficient data. India recorded a GHI score of 24.1, placing it in the serious hunger category. The report, titled *No Security Without Food Security*, assessed hunger through indicators of undernourishment, child nutrition and child mortality.

Key Points:

- **India's Rank and Score:** India ranked 100th among 122 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2026, with a score of 24.1. The score falls within the serious hunger category, covering values from 20.0 to 34.9. India's GHI score declined from 37.0 in 2006 to 24.1 in 2026, reflecting an improvement in its long-term hunger indicators.
- **Four GHI Indicators:** The index measures hunger using four indicators: undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting and under-five mortality. Undernourishment measures insufficient calorie intake, while stunting and wasting indicate chronic and acute undernutrition, respectively. Under-five mortality measures the percentage of children who die before reaching their fifth birthday.
- **India's Nutrition Indicators:** According to GHI 2026, 9.8% of India's population was undernourished. Among children below five years, 29.3% were stunted and 19.0% were wasted. The under-five mortality rate stood at 2.7%, while child stunting declined from 50.0% in 2000, indicating progress in child nutrition over the long term.
- **Regional and Global Comparison:** South Asia recorded a GHI score of approximately 23.5 in 2026, compared with the global score of 18.1. India's score of 24.1 was higher than both the regional and global averages, indicating greater hunger severity. South Asia's score is also reported as 23.4 in some sources due to minor rounding differences.
- **About the Global Hunger Index:** The GHI is an annual, peer-reviewed assessment of hunger at global, regional and national levels. It is jointly published by **Concern Worldwide, Welthungerhilfe and the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV)**. The index monitors progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and is generally released around World Food Day, observed annually on October 16.

India–New Zealand FTA Comes into Force with Zero-Duty Access

In the News: The India–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) reportedly came into force on October 20, 2026, providing zero-duty access for eligible Indian exports to New Zealand. The agreement covers trade in goods, services, investment and professional mobility, with provisions intended to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation.

Key Points:

- **Agreement and Signatories:** The FTA was reported to have been signed on April 27, 2026, by India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and New Zealand's Trade and Investment Minister Todd McClay in New Delhi. Negotiations were concluded in December 2025.

- **Zero-Duty Market Access:** Under the reported agreement, New Zealand provides duty-free access to 100% of eligible Indian export tariff lines. Products expected to benefit include textiles, leather, footwear, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, gems and jewellery, and processed foods.
- **India's Tariff Commitments:** India reportedly offered preferential access on approximately 70.03% of tariff lines, covering around 95% of bilateral trade value. Sensitive agricultural and dairy products remain protected through exclusions from tariff concessions.
- **Investment and Trade Targets:** The agreement reportedly includes a commitment to facilitate USD 20 billion in investment into India over 15 years. Both countries have expressed an objective of doubling bilateral trade in goods and services by 2030.
- **Mobility and Services:** The agreement includes provisions concerning professional mobility, education and post-study employment opportunities. It also provides a framework for cooperation in technology, agriculture, pharmaceuticals and services trade.

Ipsos Quality of Care Perception Index 2026: Malaysia Ranks First, India Third

In the News: The Ipsos Health Service Report 2026 ranked Malaysia first and India third in its Quality of Care Perception Index, with Singapore securing second place. The findings were released in October 2026 and covered public perceptions of healthcare across 32 countries. India recorded favourable responses concerning healthcare quality, access to medical services and public trust, although affordability remained a major concern.

Key Points:

- **Global Rankings:** Malaysia secured first position in the Quality of Care Perception Index, followed by Singapore in second place and India in third place. Vietnam ranked fourth and Australia fifth, while Hungary recorded the lowest index score of 28%.
- **About the Index:** The index was published by Ipsos, an international market research and public opinion organisation. It measures public perceptions of healthcare quality, trust in medical services, access to doctors and pharmacies, and equality in healthcare treatment. Malaysia recorded the highest index score of 72%.
- **Survey Methodology:** Ipsos surveyed 22,528 adults across 32 countries between July 13 and August 7, 2026. The research was conducted through its online survey platform. The findings represent respondents' perceptions rather than an objective assessment of clinical outcomes or overall healthcare-system performance.
- **India's Healthcare Performance:** Around 68% of Indian respondents positively rated the quality of healthcare, while 64% expressed trust in receiving appropriate medical treatment. India recorded the highest positive response for ease of securing a doctor's appointment at 73%, while 81% reported easy access to pharmacies.
- **Healthcare Challenges:** Around 74% of Indian respondents believed that many people could not afford good healthcare, while 42% identified treatment costs as a major challenge. Diabetes was India's most frequently identified health concern at 40%, followed by mental health at 37% and stress at 33%.

25th SCO Council of Heads of Government Meeting

In the News: The 25th Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on October 20, 2026. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh represented India at the meeting. Discussions focused on economic cooperation, regional connectivity, terrorism, trade, investment and the institutional functioning of the SCO.

Key Points:

- **Meeting Details:** The 25th SCO Council of Heads of Government Meeting was held under the chairmanship of Tajikistan. Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh represented India, while representatives from the other SCO member states participated in discussions on regional economic and security cooperation.
- **India's Position on Terrorism:** Rajnath Singh called for coordinated measures against terrorism, including action against organisations and individuals providing financial assistance or safe havens to terrorist groups. He emphasised the need for consistent action against terrorism without selective standards.

- **Economic Cooperation:** India supported the Action Plan for the Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation for 2026–2030. The discussions covered investment, resilient supply chains, industrial cooperation, food security, energy security and greater opportunities for farmers, entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- **Connectivity Initiatives:** India highlighted the importance of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and Iran's Chabahar Port in improving connectivity with Central Asia. Rajnath Singh also emphasised that regional connectivity projects should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of participating countries.
- **Major Outcomes:** The member states adopted a Joint Communiqué and approved decisions concerning multilateral economic cooperation, industry, transport and the SCO budget for 2027. The chairmanship of the Council of Heads of Government passed to Uzbekistan, which will host the next meeting in 2027.

What Saudi Arabia's execution of Bangladesh nationals tells us about Islamic law

In the News: Saudi Arabia executed two Bangladeshi nationals in the Makkah region on October 14, 2026, following their conviction for an alleged indecent act inside a mosque. The executions were carried out under ta'zir, a category of discretionary punishment under Islamic criminal law. Bangladesh subsequently sought clarification from Saudi authorities regarding the executions and the circumstances surrounding the case.

Key Points:

- **Details of the Incident:** Saudi authorities executed a Bangladeshi man and woman after a court convicted them of an offence described as violating the sanctity of a mosque in Makkah. The precise nature of the alleged conduct and the full details of the proceedings were not publicly disclosed.
- **Bangladesh's Diplomatic Response:** Bangladesh's diplomatic mission sent a note verbale to the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 15, 2026, requesting clarification. The communication followed reports that Bangladeshi diplomatic authorities had not received advance notification of the executions.
- **About Ta'zir Law:** Ta'zir refers to discretionary punishment under Islamic criminal law for offences without a fixed prescribed penalty under the other classical categories. Depending on the applicable legal framework, punishments may include fines, imprisonment or more severe penalties. A conviction under ta'zir does not automatically require capital punishment.
- **Categories of Islamic Criminal Law:** Classical Islamic criminal jurisprudence commonly distinguishes three categories: hudud, qisas and ta'zir. Hudud covers offences associated with fixed punishments, while qisas concerns retaliation or compensation for offences against persons. Ta'zir concerns discretionary penalties determined within the applicable legal framework.
- **Judicial and Diplomatic Issues:** Saudi Arabia's legal tradition has historically been influenced by the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence. The incident has raised questions about the scope of judicial discretion, transparency in criminal proceedings and consular communication. Saudi authorities stated that the death sentences had been upheld before royal orders authorised their implementation.

SIMBEX-2026: 33rd India-Singapore Maritime Exercise Begins in Visakhapatnam

In the News: The 33rd edition of the Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX-2026) commenced at Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on October 21, 2026. The six-day exercise, scheduled to conclude on October 26, involves the Indian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy. It focuses on maritime cooperation, operational interoperability and coordinated naval operations in the Bay of Bengal.

Key Points:

- **Exercise Background:** SIMBEX began in 1994 under the name Exercise Lion King and has developed into an annual bilateral naval engagement between India and Singapore. The exercise promotes professional exchanges, maritime operational coordination and joint training between the two naval forces.
- **Participating Naval Vessels:** The Republic of Singapore Navy deployed RSS Supreme, which arrived in Visakhapatnam on October 21, 2026. The opening ceremony was conducted aboard the Indian Navy's INS Nilgiri and INS Kamorta, with senior officers from India's Eastern Naval Command and Singapore's naval fleet attending.

- **Harbour Phase Activities:** The Harbour Phase is scheduled from October 21 to 23, 2026, at Visakhapatnam. It includes professional interactions, Subject Matter Expert Exchanges (SMEEs), cross-deck visits, sporting activities and planning conferences to strengthen coordination between the participating naval personnel.
- **Sea Phase Operations:** The Sea Phase will take place from October 24 to 26, 2026, in the Bay of Bengal. It will feature Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare, anti-air warfare, seamanship exercises and tactical manoeuvres designed to improve coordination during complex maritime operations.
- **Strategic Maritime Cooperation:** SIMBEX forms part of the bilateral defence engagement between India and Singapore, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. The exercise strengthens operational interoperability and supports cooperation in maritime security, naval training and coordinated responses to common maritime challenges.

National Geographic Names Jaipur to Best of the World 2027 List

In the News: National Geographic included Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, in its Best of the World 2027 list, released on October 20, 2026. The annual selection features 25 destinations worldwide recognised for their cultural heritage, natural attractions and distinctive travel experiences. Jaipur's inclusion coincides with preparations for the city's 300th founding anniversary in 2027.

Key Points:

- **Global Recognition:** National Geographic's Best of the World 2027 list features 25 destinations selected by its international community of travel writers, editors and explorers. Jaipur was included for its historic architecture, traditional crafts, cultural festivals and preserved urban heritage. The list is an editorial selection rather than a numerical ranking.
- **Historical Background:** Jaipur was founded in 1727 by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, the ruler of Amber, and is recognised as one of India's earliest planned cities. Its layout was developed by architect Vidyadhar Bhattacharya using principles of Vastu Shastra and traditional town planning. The city will mark its 300th anniversary in 2027.
- **UNESCO World Heritage Recognition:** The walled city of Jaipur was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2019 for its exceptional urban planning and architectural heritage. The Jantar Mantar astronomical observatory received separate UNESCO recognition in 2010. Jaipur is also known for Hawa Mahal, City Palace, Amber Fort and Jal Mahal.
- **Architectural and Cultural Heritage:** Jaipur is popularly called the Pink City because of the terracotta-pink appearance of its historic buildings, a tradition associated with the 1876 visit of the Prince of Wales. The city is renowned for block printing, gemstone jewellery, blue pottery and traditional handicrafts. Its historic markets include Johari Bazar and Tripolia Bazar.
- **Jaipur Literature Festival:** National Geographic also highlighted the internationally recognised Jaipur Literature Festival, which attracts writers, scholars and literary enthusiasts. Its 20th edition is scheduled for January 14–18, 2027. The festival, together with Jaipur's architectural monuments and artistic traditions, forms part of the city's international cultural identity.

Badr Defence Cooperation Pact Signed in Doha

In the News: Qatar, Türkiye, Pakistan and Indonesia signed the Badr Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Doha, Qatar, on October 21, 2026. The four-nation agreement aims to strengthen defence manufacturing, military capabilities, technical training and research cooperation. It establishes a framework for collaboration in defence technology development, industrial production and integrated military supply chains.

Key Points:

- **Participating Countries:** The Badr MoU was signed by Qatar, Türkiye, Pakistan and Indonesia during a meeting in Doha, the capital of Qatar. The agreement brings together four countries from West Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, establishing a multilateral framework for defence-industrial cooperation and technological collaboration.

- **Defence Industrial Integration:** The pact seeks to facilitate technology transfers, joint production projects and the establishment of integrated defence supply chains. Türkiye contributes an established defence manufacturing sector, while Pakistan and Indonesia possess industrial and manufacturing capabilities.
- **Nature of the Agreement:** The Badr MoU is a defence-industrial cooperation arrangement rather than a collective defence treaty. It does not establish an automatic mutual-defence obligation among the four participating countries. Its principal provisions concern defence production, industrial partnerships, technological development and professional military training.
- **Regional Defence Cooperation:** The agreement expands defence-industrial partnerships linking countries across the Gulf region, South Asia and Southeast Asia. It is intended to reduce reliance on external suppliers by encouraging collaborative manufacturing and technological development. The framework also provides opportunities for cooperation in maintaining and modernising military equipment.

United Nations Day 2026

In the News: United Nations Day is observed worldwide on October 24, 2026, marking the 81st anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations. The observance commemorates the entry into force of the UN Charter on October 24, 1945. UN Secretary-General António Guterres calls upon countries to strengthen international cooperation, uphold international law and address global challenges involving conflict, climate change and inequality.

Key Points:

- **Historical Background:** The United Nations formally comes into existence on October 24, 1945, following the Second World War. Its founding Charter bears the date June 26, 1945, when representatives sign it in San Francisco, United States. The organisation initially comprises 51 founding member countries and aims to maintain international peace, promote cooperation and protect human rights.
- **Official Recognition of UN Day:** The United Nations General Assembly officially recognises October 24 as United Nations Day under Resolution 168 (II), dated October 31, 1947. Subsequently, Resolution 2782 (XXVI) of 1971 declares the occasion an international holiday and recommends its observance as a public holiday by member countries.
- **Organisational Structure:** The United Nations currently comprises 193 member countries and operates through six principal organs, including the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice and Secretariat. Its headquarters is located in New York, United States, while the International Court of Justice functions from The Hague, Netherlands.
- **Security Council Composition:** The UN Security Council consists of 15 members, comprising five permanent and ten non-permanent members. The permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The General Assembly elects non-permanent members for two-year terms, while the permanent members possess veto powers over substantive decisions.

Ukraine Joins NATO Procurement Agency Partnership

In the News: Ukraine's Ministry of Defence announced that the country had gained access to military equipment procurement through NATO's Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA). The development follows an agreement signed on October 14, 2026, establishing Ukraine's participation in the Security Cooperation Support Partnership. The arrangement strengthens defence procurement cooperation without granting Ukraine NATO membership.

Key Points:

- **Security Cooperation Support Partnership:** The agreement was signed between Ukraine and the NATO Support and Procurement Organisation (NSPO), providing access to procurement services through NSPA. The Ukrainian Cabinet approved the draft agreement on August 13, 2026, and Defence Minister Evgeniy Khmara signed it on October 14, 2026.
- **NATO Support and Procurement Agency:** NSPA is NATO's principal logistics and procurement agency, headquartered in Capellen, Luxembourg. Established in its present institutional form in July 2012, it is the executive body of NSPO and operates on a customer-funded, no-profit-no-loss basis.

- **Defence Procurement Mechanism:** Ukraine can procure military equipment through existing NSPA contracts or newly organised tenders. The partnership enables consolidation of procurement requirements, potentially reducing costs and accelerating supplies, while providing access to established procurement, maintenance and logistical support mechanisms.
- **Participation of Ukrainian Defence Industry:** Ukrainian manufacturers can register in the NSPA supplier database and participate in international procurement tenders. The arrangement creates opportunities to supply equipment and services, secure international contracts and become more closely integrated with NATO-linked defence supply chains.
- **NATO Membership Distinction:** Ukraine remains a non-member partner of NATO despite gaining procurement access through NSPA. NATO was established on April 4, 1949, through the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington, D.C. Its collective-defence principle is contained in Article 5, which applies to NATO members.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

Sangeet Natak Akademi Selects 106 Artists for Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar 2024-2025

In the News: The Sangeet Natak Akademi selected 106 young artists for the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar for 2024 and 2025. The selections were approved by the Akademi's General Council during its meeting held in New Delhi from March 22 to 26, 2026. The awards recognise emerging talent in music, dance, theatre and other performing arts.

Key Points:

- **Selection of Awardees:** The General Council of Sangeet Natak Akademi selected 106 young artists for the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar covering 2024 and 2025. The selections include performers from different states and Union Territories. The awards recognise artistic excellence in classical, traditional, folk and contemporary performing arts.
- **About the Award:** The Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar was instituted by Sangeet Natak Akademi in 2006. It recognises outstanding young Indian artists up to the age of 40 years. The award is named after Bharat Ratna recipient Ustad Bismillah Khan, the renowned shehnai maestro.
- **Award Categories:** The awards cover music, dance, theatre, traditional and folk performing arts, tribal traditions and puppetry. Recognition is also provided for contributions and scholarship in the performing arts. The programme supports young practitioners working across India's diverse cultural traditions.
- **Prize Money and Ceremony:** Each recipient receives ₹25,000, a Tamrapatra and an Angavastram. Union Minister of Culture and Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat was scheduled to confer the 2024–2025 awards on October 19, 2026, at the Meghdoot Complex, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi. The ceremony was organised under the Sangeet Natak Akademi.
- **About Sangeet Natak Akademi:** Sangeet Natak Akademi is India's National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, established in 1953. It functions under the Ministry of Culture and promotes the preservation and development of performing arts. For 2024 and 2025, the Akademi also selected seven Fellows and 108 recipients of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards.

Assam Names Usha Mangeshkar First Bhupen Hazarika Award Recipient

In the News: The Assam government announced veteran playback singer Usha Mangeshkar as the inaugural recipient of the Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika National Award. The newly instituted award recognises outstanding contributions to Indian music, arts and cinema. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to present the award on November 29, 2026, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, during the concluding ceremony of Bhupen Hazarika's birth centenary celebrations.

Key Points:

- **Establishment of the Award:** The Assam Cabinet, led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, approved the establishment of the Dr. Bhupen Hazarika National Award in October 2026. The award has been instituted to honour the artistic and cultural legacy of the renowned Assamese singer, composer and filmmaker Bhupen Hazarika. Usha Mangeshkar was selected as its first recipient.

- **Award Structure and Prize:** The award will be conferred once every three years upon nationally or internationally recognised personalities in music, arts, cinema and related fields. It carries a cash prize of ₹10 lakh and a citation. Its purpose is to acknowledge individuals who have made significant contributions to India's artistic and cultural traditions.
- **Presentation Ceremony:** The inaugural award is scheduled to be presented on November 29, 2026, at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. The event will conclude the birth centenary celebrations of Bhupen Hazarika, who was born on September 8, 1926. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to confer the honour during the ceremony.
- **About Usha Mangeshkar:** Usha Mangeshkar is a veteran Indian playback singer known for her contributions to Hindi, Marathi and regional-language music. She belongs to the renowned Mangeshkar musical family and is the younger sister of Late Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle. Her career includes devotional songs, film music and traditional compositions across several Indian languages.
- **Bhupen Hazarika's Legacy:** Bhupen Hazarika, popularly known as Sudhakantha, was an influential Assamese singer, poet, composer and filmmaker. He received the Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 1992 and the Padma Vibhushan posthumously in 2012. He was also posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna in 2019 for his contributions to Indian music and culture.

ENVIRONMENT

India Begins Red List Assessment of 1,211 Bird Species

In the News: India initiated a nationwide Red List Assessment of 1,211 bird species using the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) framework. Preliminary assessments of more than 100 species have reportedly been completed. The exercise aims to evaluate extinction risks and update the conservation status of India's bird species.

Key Points:

- **Assessment Coverage:** The national exercise covers 1,211 bird species found across India. Preliminary assessments of more than 100 species have reportedly been completed, while the final assessment is expected by the end of 2027.
- **Great Indian Bustard:** The Great Indian Bustard (Ardeotis nigriceps) is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. It is primarily associated with dry grassland ecosystems, particularly in Rajasthan and Gujarat, and faces threats from habitat loss and collisions with overhead power lines.
- **Indian Roller:** The Indian Roller (Coracias benghalensis) is reportedly being evaluated for the Vulnerable category in the national assessment. It is widely distributed across India and is the state bird of Karnataka, Odisha and Telangana.
- **IUCN Red List Categories:** The IUCN Red List classifies species into categories including Extinct (EX), Extinct in the Wild (EW), Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), Near Threatened (NT), Least Concern (LC), Data Deficient (DD) and Not Evaluated (NE). The CR, EN and VU categories collectively represent threatened species.
- **IUCN Background:** The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was established in 1948 and is headquartered in Gland, Switzerland. The IUCN Red List was established in 1964 to assess species' extinction risks using scientific criteria.

UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2026

In the News: The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released the 17th edition of its Emissions Gap Report in October 2026, titled "The Point of Return". The report warned that global warming is expected to exceed the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C threshold under current trajectories. It outlined the emission reductions required to minimise temperature overshoot and bring global warming back to 1.5°C by the end of the century.

Key Points:

- **Report Overview:** The Emissions Gap Report has been published annually by UNEP since 2010 to assess the difference between projected greenhouse gas emissions and levels compatible with global climate targets. The 2026 edition examines pathways for returning to 1.5°C after a temporary temperature overshoot. UNEP is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya.

- **Required Emission Reductions:** The report estimates that global greenhouse gas emissions must decline by 18% by 2030, 45% by 2035 and 69% by 2040, relative to 2025 levels. These reductions are required for the lowest feasible 1.5°C overshoot pathway. The findings highlight the need for stronger national climate commitments and accelerated implementation of mitigation measures.
- **Projected Global Temperature Rise:** The report identifies a scenario in which global warming peaks at approximately 1.7°C to 1.8°C around the middle of the century. Under this pathway, temperatures could return to or below 1.5°C by 2100 with approximately 50% probability. Achieving this would require substantial emission reductions and increasing carbon dioxide removal.
- **Gap in Climate Commitments:** Full implementation of current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) would reduce emissions by only 5–8% by 2030 and 11–15% by 2035, compared with 2025 levels. These commitments would leave the world on a trajectory towards approximately 2.6°C of warming during this century. The report therefore highlighted the difference between existing pledges and the reductions required to meet the Paris Agreement's temperature goals.
- **Mitigation Priorities:** The report emphasised expanding renewable energy capacity, improving energy efficiency, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and accelerating methane emission reductions. It also identified the importance of carbon dioxide removal technologies and stronger climate policies. These measures are linked to the goals of the Paris Agreement, adopted at COP21 in 2015.

SCIENCE AND TECH

NASA's PUFFINS Mission: Indian-Origin Scientist to Study Cosmic Dust and the Search for Life

In the News: Indian-origin scientist Dr Ramya Anche has been selected to lead NASA's PUFFINS mission, a space telescope project receiving approximately USD 20 million in funding. The mission will study interstellar dust by observing ultraviolet light from distant stars. It is being developed under NASA's Astrophysics Pioneers programme, with the University of Arizona leading the project.

Key Points:

- **About the PUFFINS Mission:** PUFFINS stands for Polarimetry in the Ultraviolet to Find Features in INterStellar Dust. It is a small-satellite astronomy mission designed to investigate the composition, alignment and behaviour of dust particles between stars. The observations will contribute to research on the formation and evolution of stars and planetary systems.
- **Indian-Origin Mission Leader:** Dr Ramya Anche is the Principal Investigator of PUFFINS and an Assistant Research Professor at the University of Arizona's Steward Observatory. She grew up near Bengaluru and earned her doctorate at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics. Her research specialises in astronomical polarimetry, optical instrumentation and space telescopes.
- **Mission Technology:** PUFFINS will carry an ultraviolet telescope approximately 10 inches in diameter and observe light from around 70 stars. It will use ultraviolet spectropolarimetry to measure changes in the polarisation of starlight caused by interstellar dust. The mission will study extremely small dust grains, including particles measuring less than 50 nanometres.
- **Scientific Objectives:** The mission will investigate how interstellar dust grains form, evolve and align with magnetic fields. These particles absorb and scatter starlight and contribute material to clouds from which stars and planets develop. The observations may also improve methods for analysing astronomical signals affected by cosmic dust.
- **Funding and International Collaboration:** NASA has awarded approximately USD 20 million to the University of Arizona-led project under its Astrophysics Pioneers programme. The mission involves McDonald Observatory and international research partners, including Indian institutions. It remains in development, with the University of Arizona targeting a launch around 2030.

STATIC

RSS at 101: Why, and how, the organisation was first formed

In the News: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) marked its 101st anniversary on Vijayadashami in October 2026. The organisation was founded by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in Nagpur on September 27, 1925. Its establishment emerged from debates surrounding nationalism, Hindu social organisation and the political developments of the Indian freedom movement.

Key Points:

- **Foundation and Founder:** The RSS was established on September 27, 1925, on Vijayadashami, by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Hedgewar, a physician and former Congress activist, founded the organisation with a small group of volunteers.
- **Historical Background:** The organisation emerged during the period following the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–1922) and the Khilafat Movement. Hedgewar disagreed with aspects of Congress politics and sought to establish an independent organisation focused on Hindu social consolidation and discipline.
- **Organisational Structure:** The Shakha became the RSS's basic organisational unit, involving physical exercises, discussions and ideological training. The first daily Shakha was organised at Mohite Wada, Nagpur, on May 28, 1926.
- **Naming and Leadership:** The name Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was formally selected on April 17, 1926. Hedgewar served as its founding leader and was succeeded by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (M. S. Golwalkar) in 1940.
- **Organisational Development:** The RSS developed as a Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation with an emphasis on cultural identity, social organisation and training. It did not participate institutionally in major Congress-led movements such as the Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement, a historical position that has attracted criticism and debate.

Ashfaqullah Khan Birth Anniversary 2026: Kakori Case and Freedom Struggle

In the News: India commemorated the 126th birth anniversary of revolutionary freedom fighter Ashfaqullah Khan on October 22, 2026. Born on October 22, 1900, in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, he was a prominent member of the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA). He is remembered for his participation in the Kakori Train Action of 1925 and his sacrifice during India's struggle against British colonial rule.

Key Points:

- **Early Life and Revolutionary Ideology:** Ashfaqullah Khan was born on October 22, 1900, in Shahjahanpur in present-day Uttar Pradesh. He became associated with revolutionary nationalism after the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922 following the Chauri Chaura incident. He developed a close association with Ram Prasad Bismil and supported armed resistance against British rule.
- **Hindustan Republican Association:** Ashfaqullah Khan was associated with the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA), established in 1924 by revolutionaries including Ram Prasad Bismil, Sachindra Nath Sanyal and Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee. The organisation aimed to overthrow British colonial rule through revolutionary action and establish an independent republican government in India.
- **Kakori Train Action of 1925:** On August 9, 1925, members of the HRA carried out the Kakori Train Action near Lucknow in the United Provinces. Revolutionaries, including Ashfaqullah Khan, Ram Prasad Bismil and Chandrashekhar Azad, targeted government treasury funds being transported by train. The operation was intended to secure financial resources for revolutionary activities against British rule.\
- **Arrest and Kakori Conspiracy Case:** Following the Kakori incident, British authorities launched extensive investigations and arrested several revolutionaries. He was subsequently prosecuted in connection with the Kakori Conspiracy Case and sentenced to death by the colonial judicial authorities.
- **Martyrdom and Historical Legacy:** Ashfaqullah Khan was executed on December 19, 1927, at Faizabad Jail in present-day Uttar Pradesh. Ram Prasad Bismil and Thakur Roshan Singh were also executed on the same day, while Rajendra Nath Lahiri had been executed on December 17, 1927. Ashfaqullah Khan is remembered for his revolutionary nationalism, patriotic Urdu poetry and commitment to communal harmony during the freedom struggle.

What does the Cabinet Secretary do, and what are the limits of the office's powers?

In the News: The Cabinet Secretary's powers came under discussion after the Cabinet Secretariat declined to initiate action against IAS officer Maneesh Garg, serving in the Election Commission of India. Two Election Commissioners had raised objections concerning the officer's administrative conduct. The Secretariat cited the Election Commission's constitutional independence, highlighting the limits of executive authority over autonomous constitutional institutions.

Key Points:

- **Position and Appointment:** The Cabinet Secretary is India's senior-most civil servant and administrative head of the Cabinet Secretariat, which functions under the Prime Minister. T. V. Somanathan, a 1987-batch IAS officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre, is the incumbent Cabinet Secretary as of October 2026. N. R. Pillai became the first Cabinet Secretary of independent India in 1950.
- **Constitutional and Legal Framework:** The Cabinet Secretariat administers the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, and the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961. Both sets of rules derive their constitutional authority from Article 77(3), which empowers the President to make rules for the convenient transaction of Union government business.
- **Administrative Responsibilities**: The Cabinet Secretary coordinates among Union ministries, assists Cabinet and Cabinet Committee proceedings, monitors decisions and helps resolve inter-ministerial differences. The office also coordinates government responses during major national crises and supports the implementation of decisions requiring cooperation among multiple departments.
- **Role in Civil Services Administration:** The Cabinet Secretary serves as the ex-officio Chairman of the Civil Services Board and plays an important role in senior bureaucratic appointments. The office assists the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet, while the Department of Personnel and Training functions as the cadre-controlling authority for the Indian Administrative Service.
- **Limitations of Authority:** The Cabinet Secretary exercises administrative and coordinating powers but cannot independently override constitutional bodies or decisions reserved for ministers and other competent authorities. Article 324 vests the superintendence, direction and control of elections in the Election Commission of India. The Cabinet Secretariat's decision not to intervene in the commission's internal disciplinary matter reflected this institutional autonomy.

SPORTS

Sheetal Devi Equals World Record in Asian Para Games Archery

In the News: Indian para-archer Sheetal Devi equalled the world record in the women's compound archery qualification round at the Asian Para Games 2026 in Nagoya, Japan, on October 19. She scored 704 points out of 720, establishing a new Asian record. Her performance placed her at the top of the qualification standings and strengthened India's prospects in the archery competition.

Key Points:

- **World Record Performance:** Sheetal Devi scored 704 points from 72 arrows in the women's compound qualification round. Her performance included 57 perfect 10s, of which 32 were Xs, representing arrows closest to the centre of the target. She equalled the existing world record.
- **Previous Record:** The world record of 704 points was established by Türkiye's Öznur Cüre Girdi at the Paris Paralympics in 2024. Sheetal surpassed her previous Asian record of 698 points by six points. She also improved upon her earlier Asian Para Games record of 680 points, achieved at Hangzhou in 2023.
- **About Sheetal Devi:** The 19-year-old archer belongs to Jammu and Kashmir and was born without fully developed arms. She competes using a specialised technique involving her feet, shoulder and jaw. She won a bronze medal at the Paris Paralympic Games in 2024.
- **India's Team Performance:** Payal Nag of Odisha scored 675 points in the women's compound qualification round on her Asian Para Games debut. Sheetal and Payal combined for 1,379 points, placing India first in the women's compound team standings ahead of China, which scored 1,338 points.

- **Previous Achievements:** Sheetal won two gold medals and one silver medal at the 2023 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, China. Her achievements include success in individual and mixed-team compound archery events. Her latest performance established a new continental benchmark while equalling the world record.

Asian Para Games 2026

In the News: The fifth edition of the Asian Para Games commenced on October 18, 2026, in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, and will conclude on October 24, 2026. The continental multi-sport event features para-athletes competing in 18 sports. India has sent a 281-member contingent, including 168 athletes, and aims to build upon its record performance at the previous edition.

Key Points:

- **Host and Schedule:** The 5th Asian Para Games are being held from October 18 to 24, 2026, in Aichi Prefecture and Nagoya, Japan. The opening ceremony took place at Paloma Mizuho Stadium in Nagoya. The official mascot of the Games is Uzumin.
- **Sports and Events:** The competition features 18 sports, including para-athletics, para-badminton, para-swimming, para-archery, para-table tennis and wheelchair tennis. The programme comprises approximately 502 medal events, providing opportunities for athletes across different disability classifications.
- **Indian Contingent:** India's approved delegation comprises 281 members, including 168 athletes and 113 officials and support personnel. The athlete contingent consists of 112 men and 56 women competing across 11 sports. Para-athletics has the largest Indian representation, with 62 athletes.
- **Prominent Indian Athletes:** India's contingent includes Paralympic medallists and leading para-athletes such. as Sumit Antil, Avani Lekhara, Sheetal Devi, Pramod Bhagat and Bhavina Patel. Pramod Bhagat and Bhavina Patel were selected as India's opening-ceremony flag-bearers.
- **India's Previous Performance:** India won a record 111 medals at the 2022 Asian Para Games, which were held in Hangzhou, China, in 2023. The medal tally included 29 gold, 31 silver and 51 bronze medals. It was India's best performance at the Asian Para Games and provides the benchmark for its 2026 campaign.

United States to Host Inaugural Women's Club World Cup

In the News: The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) announced on October 22, 2026, that the United States will host the inaugural FIFA Women's Club World Cup in 2028. The tournament will be held from January 5 to 30, 2028, bringing together 19 leading women's football clubs from all six continental confederations. The host selection was approved by the Bureau of the FIFA Council.

Key Points:

- **Inaugural Tournament Details:** The FIFA Women's Club World Cup 2028 will be the first edition of the international women's club football championship organised by FIFA. It is scheduled from January 5 to 30, 2028, in the United States. The tournament will follow a four-year cycle and feature 19 clubs representing six continental football confederations.
- **Confederation-Wise Allocation:** Europe, represented by UEFA, will receive six berths, the highest allocation among the confederations. Asia (AFC), Africa (CAF), North and Central America and the Caribbean (CONCACAF), and South America (CONMEBOL) will receive three berths each. Oceania (OFC) will have one participating club.
- **Qualification Framework:** Clubs will qualify primarily through their performances in their confederations' leading women's club competitions during the four-year qualification period covering seasons ending between 2024 and 2027. The system prioritises continental champions and applies club-ranking mechanisms where necessary to determine the remaining participants.
- **First Seven Qualified Clubs:** FIFA confirmed Arsenal Women FC of England, FC Barcelona Femení of Spain, Club América Femenil of Mexico, Gotham FC of the United States, Naegohyang Women's FC of North Korea, SC Corinthians of Brazil and Wuhan Jiangda WFC of China among the first seven qualified teams. The remaining qualification places will be determined under the approved continental framework.

Harry Brook Scores Fastest Double Century in ODI Cricket History

In the News: England captain Harry Brook established a new record for the fastest double century in men's One Day International cricket. Playing against Sri Lanka at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Pakistan, Brook reached 200 runs in just 114 balls. He completed his innings with 202 runs from 116 deliveries, surpassing the previous record held by India's Shubman Gill. Despite his record-breaking performance, England lost the match.

Key Points:

- **Record-Breaking Innings:** Harry Brook scored 202 runs from 116 balls, including 21 fours and 10 sixes, during England's ODI against Sri Lanka on October 22, 2026. He reached the 200-run milestone in just 114 deliveries, becoming the fastest batter to achieve an ODI double century. The achievement took place during a tri-nation series involving England, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.
- **Previous World Record:** Brook surpassed the record held by Indian batter Shubman Gill, who had reached an ODI double century in 117 balls against the West Indies in September 2026. Gill had previously broken Ishan Kishan's record of 126 balls against Bangladesh in December 2022. Brook improved Gill's record by three deliveries.
- **First English ODI Double Century**: Brook became the first England batter to score a double century in men's ODI cricket. He surpassed Ben Stokes's previous record for the highest individual ODI score by an English batter, which was 182 against New Zealand in 2023. Brook's innings also became the highest individual ODI score recorded on Pakistani soil.
- **Match Result and Historic Chase:** England posted 429/4, establishing a new record for the highest men's ODI team total in Pakistan. However, Sri Lanka successfully chased the target of 430 runs with two wickets and one ball remaining.
- **Additional ODI Records:** The match produced a combined total of 859 runs, the second-highest match aggregate in ODI cricket history. Sri Lanka's successful chase of 430 became the second-highest successful run chase in men's ODIs. England batter Joe Root also became the first English player to reach 8,000 ODI runs during the match.

Lionel Messi Receives 2026 Princess of Asturias Sports Award

In the News: Argentine football legend Lionel Messi received the 2026 Princess of Asturias Award for Sports on October 23, 2026, at the Campoamor Theatre in Oviedo, Spain. The award recognised his exceptional football career, sporting achievements and humanitarian contributions. Messi became the first footballer to receive the award individually, with Princess Leonor presenting the honour during the official ceremony.

Key Points:

- **Award Presentation:** Lionel Messi was presented with the Princess of Asturias Award for Sports by Princess Leonor of Spain on October 23, 2026. The ceremony took place at the Campoamor Theatre in Oviedo, the capital of the Principality of Asturias. The award recognises outstanding achievements in sports and contributions to society through sporting activities.
- **About the Award:** The Princess of Asturias Awards are presented annually by the Princess of Asturias Foundation, based in Spain. They recognise exceptional contributions across eight categories, including Arts, Literature, Sports and International Cooperation. Each award includes a sculpture designed by Joan Miró, a diploma, an insignia and a cash prize of €50,000.
- **Historic Recognition:** Messi became the first footballer to receive the Princess of Asturias Sports Award as an individual recipient. Previously, Spanish footballers Iker Casillas and Xavi Hernández received the honour jointly in 2012. The Brazilian national football team was also recognised in 2002 following its fifth FIFA World Cup victory.
- **Messi's Football Achievements:** Born on June 24, 1987, in Rosario, Argentina, Lionel Messi is among football's most decorated players. He captained Argentina to victory in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and has won eight Ballon d'Or awards. His professional career includes major achievements with FC Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Miami CF.
- **Humanitarian Contributions**: The award jury highlighted Messi's sustained charitable work supporting education, healthcare and opportunities for disadvantaged children. His humanitarian activities, including initiatives associated

with the Leo Messi Foundation, contributed to his selection. The award recognised his sporting excellence alongside his commitment to social responsibility and the development of future generations.

Pankaj Advani Wins 29th World Title

In the News: Indian cue sports legend Pankaj Advani won his 29th world title at the 2026 World Billiards Championship in England. He defeated England's Robert Hall by 1,906–1,206 points in the final, securing his 21st world title in billiards. The victory marked his return to the World Billiards Championship title after 12 years, further strengthening his record in international cue sports.

Key Points:

- **Championship Details:** The 2026 World Billiards Championship was held at Landywood Snooker Club in Great Wyrley, England, under World Billiards Limited. Advani defeated Robert Hall in a five-hour final by 1,906–1,206 points, securing his 29th world title across billiards and snooker.
- **Tournament Performance:** Advani defeated compatriot Sourav Kothari 1,134–575 in the quarterfinals and defending champion David Causier 1,607–1,271 in the semifinals. His victory ended Causier's unbeaten World Championship run dating back to 2023, while Advani recorded a highest break of 587 during the tournament.
- **Career Achievements:** Advani's 29 world titles comprise 21 billiards titles and eight snooker titles. The 41-year-old player had previously won the same World Billiards Championship title in 2014, when he also defeated Robert Hall in the final.
- **National Honours:** Pankaj Advani received the Arjuna Award in 2004, Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna in 2006, Padma Shri in 2009 and Padma Bhushan in 2018. The Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award was renamed the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award in 2021.
- **Other Indian Achievement:** India's Shruthi Lakshminarayanan won the 2026 Women's World Billiards Championship, defeating Sweden's Eva Palmius 414–153 in the final. The victory marked her third consecutive women's world billiards title, adding another major achievement for India at the same championship venue.