

Weekly Current Affairs 19th April to 25th April 2026

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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Defeat of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026

In the News: The Lok Sabha failed to pass the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which sought to fast-track the implementation of 33% reservation for women in legislatures by enabling delimitation based on the 2011 Census. The Bill secured only 298 votes against the required special majority of 352, leading to its defeat and the withdrawal of two allied Bills.

Key Points:

- **The Bill and Its Purpose:** The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on April 16, 2026, alongside two allied Bills — the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and the Delimitation Bill, 2026. Together, these Bills aimed to end the freeze on parliamentary constituency boundaries, enable delimitation based on the 2011 Census, increase the maximum strength of Lok Sabha from 550 to 850 seats, and advance the implementation of 33% women's reservation to the 2029 general elections.
- **Failure to Achieve Special Majority:** Under Article 368 of the Constitution, a constitutional amendment requires a special majority — a majority of the total membership of the House and at least two-thirds of members present and voting. With a House strength of 528, the Bill needed 352 votes to pass but secured only 298, falling well short of the required threshold. Following the defeat of the constitutional amendment, the two dependent statutory Bills — the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill and the Delimitation Bill — were immediately withdrawn.
- **Background — The Constituency Freeze:** The freeze on parliamentary constituency boundaries has been in place since the 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976, which fixed the number of Lok Sabha seats for each state based on the 1971 Census. The freeze was initially meant to last until the first Census after 2000, but was extended by the 84th Constitutional Amendment of 2001 until the first Census after 2026. This extension was designed to incentivise states to pursue population stabilisation without being penalised in representation.
- **Women's Reservation — The 106th Amendment:** The 106th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2023, known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam, introduced 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies and came into force on April 16, 2026. However, under Article 334A, its actual implementation is linked to a delimitation exercise based on the first Census conducted after the Act's commencement — which is the 2027 Census — making it unlikely to take effect before approximately 2034. The 131st Amendment Bill was introduced specifically to delink women's reservation from the post-2027 Census and instead base it on the 2011 Census, advancing implementation to 2029.
- **The North–South Divide — Core Controversy:** The primary political obstacle to the Bill's passage was the demographic disparity between states. Opposition members, particularly from southern states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, argued that delimitation based on current population data would penalise states that had successfully controlled population growth. Under a 2011 Census-based delimitation with the current Lok Sabha strength, Tamil Nadu's seats would fall from 39 to 32 and Kerala's from 20 to 15, while Uttar Pradesh would rise from 80 to 89, Bihar from 40 to 46, and Rajasthan from 25 to 30. Opposition members demanded that women's reservation be implemented without being linked to the delimitation exercise.

SC Warns States Over Chambal Sand Mining

In the News: The Supreme Court of India took strong cognizance of illegal sand mining in the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary, slamming the "lackadaisical response" of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta warned that paramilitary forces may be deployed if states failed to curb the menace, and ordered a series of strict enforcement measures to protect the ecologically sensitive riverine protected area.



Key Points:

- **Supreme Court's Action:** While hearing a suo motu case, the Supreme Court bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta described the failure of the three state governments as "writ large on the face of record" and noted that it could suggest "tacit connivance" with illegal miners. The court flagged a "disturbing pattern of inaction and administrative indifference" and warned that paramilitary forces may be deployed if the states continued to fail in enforcement.
- **Threat from Illegal Miners:** The court noted that illegal miners operating in the sanctuary are often equipped with sophisticated weapons, with earlier reports by the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) and the amicus curiae revealing the brazen scale of illegal mining, including incidents of forest guards being killed by mining mafias. The court termed the states' claim of being outmatched by armed miners as "disquieting" and indicative of "shocking unpreparedness."
- **Court-Ordered Enforcement Measures:** The Supreme Court directed the three states to implement a series of concrete enforcement steps, including installation of high-resolution, Wi-Fi-enabled CCTV cameras across vulnerable stretches and routes used by mining operators; GPS tracking of mining vehicles and equipment as a pilot project in Morena (Madhya Pradesh) and Dholpur (Rajasthan); deployment of specialised, round-the-clock patrolling teams equipped with modern arms and communication gear in high-risk areas; and strict prosecution and accountability of state officials.
- **About the National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary:** The National Chambal Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary is one of India's most ecologically significant riverine protected areas. It is the country's first and only tri-state protected area, spanning approximately 5,400 sq km along a 600 km stretch of the Chambal River across Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. The Chambal River is one of India's cleanest and least polluted rivers, sustaining a unique ecosystem of deep channels, sandbanks, and ravines locally known as "beehad."
- **Biodiversity and Conservation Significance:** The sanctuary harbours nearly 90% of the world's remaining wild Gharial population, making it critically important for the species' survival. Other key species found here include the endangered Ganges River Dolphin, Marsh Crocodile (Mugger), Red-crowned Roof Turtle, Smooth-coated Otter, Striped Hyena, and over 330 bird species including the Indian Skimmer. The sanctuary forms part of India's Project Crocodile initiative, launched in 1975 to address the severe decline of crocodilian populations.
- **Conservation Status:** The sanctuary is recognised as an Important Bird Area (IBA), is a proposed Ramsar Site, a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage Site status, and is classified as an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category IV protected area, designated for habitat and species management.

How DMK's resistance to Centre's proposed delimitation evokes the language debates of 1950s and 60s

In the News: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin issued a strong warning to the Centre against proceeding with the proposed delimitation exercise, invoking the spirit of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) of the 1950s and 1960s. The statement drew widespread attention for its parallel to the anti-Hindi agitation of that era, reigniting debates about North-South political and demographic equity in India.

Key Points:

- **The Delimitation Controversy:** The Centre's proposed delimitation exercise — the redrawing of parliamentary constituency boundaries based on population — has alarmed southern states, particularly Tamil Nadu. Since southern states have better managed population growth compared to northern states, delimitation based on current population figures could reduce their share of seats in the Lok Sabha, shifting political representation in favour of more populous northern states.
- **Stalin's Warning:** Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin addressed the Centre in a video statement, warning against carrying out delimitation quietly during an election period and invoking the DMK of the 1950s and 1960s as a symbol of fierce regional resistance, signalling that Tamil Nadu would mount a comparable agitation if the exercise proceeded unfairly.
- **Origins of the DMK:** The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was founded in 1949 by C N Annadurai, emerging from the broader Dravidian movement led by E V Ramaswami Naicker (popularly known as "Periyar"), who advocated the



creation of a separate nation in south India called "Dravida Nadu." The party positioned itself against northern cultural and political dominance, grounding its politics in social justice, caste equality, and anti-Brahminism.

- **The Anti-Hindi Agitation:** The DMK's political rise was closely tied to the language question. When the Constituent Assembly chose Hindi as the official language of the Union in 1949, a 15-year grace period was granted for English to continue alongside it, set to expire on January 26, 1965. As the deadline approached, fears of Hindi domination in official communication intensified across southern states. C N Annadurai and others had already in 1956 passed a resolution urging that English continue as the Union's official language.
- **The 1965 Protests:** As the deadline arrived, the DMK launched a statewide agitation across Tamil Nadu. Protests included burning of Hindi books and Constitution pages, removal and blackening of Hindi signboards at railway stations and post offices, widespread strikes, bandhs, hartals, and dharnas. Tragically, the agitation also witnessed self-immolations by individuals protesting in defence of Tamil, which in turn sparked further unrest.

Ladakh to Get India's First Petroglyph Conservation Park to Safeguard Cultural Heritage

In the News: Coinciding with World Heritage Day — Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena laid the foundation stone for India's first Petroglyph Conservation Park at Sindhu Ghat on the banks of the Indus River in Ladakh. The initiative aims to protect nearly 400 petroglyph sites across the region from environmental degradation and human activities, while making this ancient rock art accessible through a curated educational setting.

Key Points:

- **What are Petroglyphs:** Petroglyphs are prehistoric images, symbols, and inscriptions carved, etched, or engraved directly onto rock surfaces. They represent one of the earliest forms of human expression and communication. Ladakh's petroglyphs depict hunting scenes, animals such as ibex and snow leopards, Buddhist symbols like stupas, and inscriptions in ancient Chinese, Arabic, and Sanskrit — reflecting centuries of cultural exchange, migration, and trade along historic routes.
- **About the Conservation Park:** The proposed park at Sindhu Ghat will serve as a dedicated conservation and display space for rock art collected from vulnerable and isolated sites across Ladakh. It will relocate endangered petroglyphs from scattered locations, create a curated educational environment for visitors, and help develop heritage circuits to regulate and promote responsible tourism. The LG described the carvings as "open-air museums" and "civilisations carved on stone."
- **Scale of Heritage at Risk:** Nearly 400 petroglyph sites have been identified across Ladakh, found in clusters as well as in isolated locations along the Indus and Zaskar river basins. Isolated sites are considered most at risk. Ladakh is regarded as one of the richest regions for prehistoric rock art in South and Central Asia, with key sites at Domkhar, Dah Hanu, Alchi, Chilling, and Tangtse.
- **Threats to Petroglyphs:** Natural weathering and climate change gradually erode these carvings. Human activities pose a greater and more immediate risk — including unregulated tourism, road construction, blasting, and infrastructure development along the Indus and Zaskar river banks. Many isolated sites lack monitoring and protection.
- **Institutional Collaboration — MoU with ASI:** A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between Ladakh's Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for joint conservation efforts. The collaboration will facilitate scientific conservation methods, systematic documentation of artefacts, and sustainable heritage management.

Delhi HC pulls up Sentencing Review Board in Mattoo case: What is premature release?

In the News: The Delhi High Court criticised the Sentencing Review Board (SRB) for rejecting — for the second time — the premature release plea of Santosh Kumar Singh, the convict in the 1996 Priyadarshini Mattoo rape and murder case. Justice Anup J Bhambhani observed that the SRB appeared to be deciding cases on the basis of public perception and the heinousness of the offence alone, rather than applying the legally mandated framework for remission.

Key Points:



- **Background — The Priyadarshini Mattoo Case:** Priyadarshini Mattoo, a Delhi University law student, was raped and murdered in 1996 by Santosh Kumar Singh, her senior. A trial court acquitted him in 1999 despite recording a finding of guilt. The Delhi High Court awarded him the death penalty in 2006, which the Supreme Court commuted to life imprisonment in 2010. Singh has now spent nearly three decades in custody.
- **What is Premature Release:** Premature release allows life convicts to be released early if they are found to be reformed, rehabilitated, and no longer a threat to society. The constitutional powers of clemency vest in the President (Article 72) and the Governor (Article 161). Statutory provisions are contained in Sections 473, 474, and 475 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS). The minimum threshold for consideration is 14 years of actual imprisonment; for offences where death was a sentencing option, Section 475 of the BNSS makes this threshold mandatory.
- **Role of the Sentencing Review Board (SRB):** The SRB is composed of senior state officials including the Director General of Prisons, the Police Commissioner, and the Chief Secretary. It examines premature release pleas and sends its recommendation to the government. Eligibility alone does not guarantee consideration — the board evaluates factors including conduct in jail, compliance with parole conditions, age, psychological profile, and prospects of rehabilitation.
- **Legal Framework — UOI vs V Sriharan (2015):** The Supreme Court, in this landmark case arising from the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, held that remission is not an unchecked executive power. It requires mandatory judicial consultation, reasoned orders, and must be guided by a range of factors. Critically, the Court held that heinousness of the offence alone is not sufficient grounds for denial of remission.
- **Court's Criticism of the SRB:** The Delhi HC set aside the SRB's first rejection in July 2025 and sent the matter for fresh consideration. The SRB rejected the plea a second time in November 2025, citing the heinous nature of the crime and potential disruption to public peace — reasoning the Court found legally inadequate. Justice Bhambhani noted he was dealing with cases where convicts had spent up to 41 years in custody, with SRBs still rejecting pleas on grounds of heinousness alone, even when jail authorities had recommended release.

OGAI to Regulate India's Online Gaming Sector from May

In the News: The Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI) is set to become operational from May 1, 2026, under the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, establishing a structured regulatory framework for India's rapidly growing online gaming sector under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

Key Points:

- **Establishment of OGAI:** The Online Gaming Authority of India has been created as a six-member digital office under MeitY. It will be chaired by the Additional Secretary of MeitY and will include Joint Secretary-level representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, and the Department of Legal Affairs.
- **Legal Basis:** OGAI has been established under the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, which forms the backbone of India's current online gaming regulatory framework, aiming to balance industry innovation with user protection.
- **Core Functions:** The authority is tasked with determining and registering online games, including recognised esports titles and skill-based gaming platforms. It will assess whether a game falls within legal and regulatory limits and ensure compliance with national standards, bringing clarity to a sector that has often faced legal uncertainty across states.
- **Mandatory Registration for Esports:** Registration is mandatory for esports platforms under the new rules. However, online games not involving real money will not require mandatory registration, reducing compliance burdens on casual and entertainment-based gaming applications.
- **User Safety and Compliance:** Gaming companies are required to implement operational and behavioural safeguards to protect users from financial and psychological harm. Platforms must also establish grievance redressal systems, allowing users to escalate unresolved complaints to the regulator.

- **India's Gaming Market:** India's online gaming industry is among the fastest-growing digital sectors in Asia, with the esports segment alone estimated to be worth over 1 to 1.5 billion US dollars, driven by smartphone penetration, affordable internet access, and a large young population.

Dhar Selected for Safe Cities Project, ₹10 Crore Allocated for Safety Measures

In the News: Dhar, a city in Madhya Pradesh known for its rich cultural and historical heritage, has been selected under the **Safe Cities Project 2026**, a central government initiative led by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development**. A dedicated funding of **₹10 crore** has been allocated for the project, which will be implemented over the next five years to enhance women's safety and urban infrastructure.

Key Points:

- **About the Safe Cities Project:** The Safe Cities Project is a central government scheme designed to enhance women's safety in urban areas by transforming public spaces into safer and more inclusive environments. It reflects the government's broader push towards women-centric development and safety reforms.
- **Dhar's Selection:** Dhar has been chosen as one of the beneficiary cities under the Safe Cities Project 2026, marking a significant step for the city's urban development and women's safety ecosystem.
- **Funding and Timeline:** A total of **₹10 crore** has been allocated specifically for Dhar, with the project to be implemented over a **five-year period**.
- **Surveillance and Infrastructure Upgrades:** The plan includes installation of **CCTV cameras** at sensitive locations, enhanced **street lighting** across the city, and advanced monitoring and control systems to improve public safety.
- **Women-Friendly Facilities:** The project envisages construction of **Pink Toilets** in public areas, dedicated waiting spaces in hospitals, and improved amenities at tourist destinations to make public spaces more accessible and safe for women.

India's New Online Gaming Rules Kick In from May 1, 2026 – What to Expect

In the News: The Government of India notified the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Rules, 2026, on April 23, 2026, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). The rules are set to come into force on May 1, 2026, establishing a unified national regulatory framework for India's rapidly growing online gaming sector.

Key Points:

- **Parent Legislation:** The rules operationalise the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, passed in 2025, which effectively banned the real money gaming sector in India — impacting major platforms such as Dream11, PokerBaazi, WinZo, and Mobile Premier League (MPL).
- **New Regulator — OGAI:** The rules establish the **Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI)** as the dedicated sectoral regulator, housed under MeitY. Its composition is entirely government-led, with representatives from the Ministries of Home Affairs, Finance, Information and Broadcasting, Sports, and Law.
- **Game Classification Powers:** OGAI is empowered to classify games into three categories — **Online Money Games** (involving monetary stakes or user fees), **Online Social Games** (no money staking), and **Esports** (skill-based competitive games). It can also issue directions, hear complaints, and impose penalties.
- **Determination and Registration System:** Formal determination of a game's category is not universally mandatory. It is required only when directed by the regulator, when a game is offered as esports, or when the government notifies specific categories based on transaction value or scale. Registration follows similar conditional applicability.
- **Financial Institutions Brought In:** Banks, payment gateways, and other intermediaries are now directly within the regulatory net. They must verify a game's regulatory status before processing transactions and must act on OGAI directions — including suspending payments — making the payments layer a key enforcement tool.
- **Two-Tier Grievance Redressal:** Users will have access to a two-tier complaint mechanism — first through the gaming platform's internal grievance system, and then through escalation to OGAI. A further appeal to a government Appellate Authority is also available.

- **Data Localisation:** Platforms offering social games or esports must store all traffic and related data within India, in line with the data localisation obligations introduced under these rules.

Supreme Court Allows Minor's 31-Week Pregnancy Termination

In the News: The Supreme Court of India allowed a 15-year-old girl to medically terminate her pregnancy of over 28–31 weeks, ruling that reproductive autonomy is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution and that no court can compel a woman, including a minor, to continue an unwanted pregnancy against her will.

Key Points:

- **The Judgment:** A Supreme Court bench comprising Justice B. V. Nagarathna and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan permitted the minor to undergo medical termination of pregnancy at AIIMS, Delhi, with all necessary medical safeguards. The case was filed by the girl's mother seeking permission for termination beyond the statutory limit under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act.
- **Constitutional Basis:** The Court held that a woman's right to make decisions concerning her own body is an essential component of personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, which protects the right to life, dignity, and privacy. It stressed that reproductive autonomy must receive the highest constitutional protection.
- **Psychological Distress:** The Court took note of the minor's severe mental distress, including two reported suicide attempts. It observed that compelling her to continue the pregnancy would cause grave emotional, physical, and psychological trauma, amounting to a direct violation of her right to live with dignity.
- **Overriding Statutory Limits:** The government argued that the pregnancy had crossed the 24-week statutory limit under the MTP Act and raised concerns about medical risks to both the girl and the foetus. It also suggested delivery followed by adoption as an alternative. The Court rejected both arguments, holding that in exceptional cases involving minors, the child's best interests and welfare must take precedence over procedural restrictions.
- **Adoption Argument Rejected:** The bench firmly rejected the contention that the availability of adoption could justify compelling childbirth. It clarified that what is relevant in such cases is the choice of the pregnant woman, not the prospects of the child to be born.
- **About the MTP Act:** The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act was originally passed in 1971 and amended in 2021. It permits abortion up to 20 weeks, with extensions permissible in special categories — such as cases involving rape, assault, mental distress, or foetal abnormalities — up to 24 weeks. Beyond this limit, only constitutional courts can grant permission in exceptional circumstances.

Kathua Border Villages Added to Vibrant Village Programme-II

In the News: The Central Government has included six border villages in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir under the Vibrant Village Programme-II (VVP-II) to boost infrastructure and ensure full delivery of welfare schemes. The villages, located along the International Border, were identified at a review meeting chaired by Kathua Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Sharma.

Key Points:

- **Villages Identified:** The six villages selected under the programme are Bobiya, Kadyala, Gajnal, Karol Krishna, Rathua, and Gujjar Chak — all situated along the International Border in Kathua district, Jammu and Kashmir. These villages face development challenges due to their remote location and proximity to sensitive frontier areas.
- **About Vibrant Village Programme:** The Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme focused on developing border villages in strategic areas. It aims to improve road connectivity, housing, tourism, and livelihood opportunities in remote border regions. VVP-II represents the second phase of this initiative, expanding its coverage to additional frontier villages.
- **Key Development Focus Areas:** Inclusion under VVP-II is expected to improve access to roads, healthcare, education, electricity, and drinking water facilities. The objective is full saturation of welfare benefits, ensuring that no eligible household is left out of social security, housing, or livelihood support programmes.

- **Implementation Directives:** Deputy Commissioner Rajesh Sharma directed officials to ensure timely execution of development plans through regular monitoring and close inter-departmental coordination. Departments were asked to conduct field-level verification, identify service gaps, and ensure last-mile delivery of all flagship government schemes.

Safe Travel on National Highways Under Article 21

In the News: The Supreme Court of India, in a suo motu case arising from two fatal road accidents in November 2025 that claimed 34 lives in Rajasthan and Telangana, recognised commuter safety as an integral facet of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution. A Division Bench of Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Atul S. Chandurkar issued comprehensive nationwide interim directions to prevent highway accidents and enforce road safety standards.

Key Points:

- **Constitutional Basis — Article 21:** The Court held that the Right to Life under Article 21 is not merely a guarantee against the unlawful taking of life, but a positive mandate upon the State to ensure a safe environment where human life is preserved and valued. Commuter safety on National Highways was recognised as an integral component of the right to live with dignity.
- **Trigger — Two Fatal Accidents:** The Court took suo motu cognizance following two back-to-back tragedies. On November 2, 2025, a bus carrying pilgrims rammed into a stationary trailer parked near an unauthorised dhaba on the Bharatmala Expressway in Phalodi, Rajasthan, killing 15 people. On November 3, 2025, a lorry collided head-on with a bus while swerving to avoid a pothole on NH-163 near Chevella, Rangareddy, Telangana, killing 19 people — including a 40-day-old infant. The Telangana stretch lacked basic safety infrastructure such as streetlights, dividers, and signage.
- **Highway Accident Statistics:** National Highways constitute approximately 2% of India's total road length but account for nearly 30% of all road fatalities. The Court stated that a high-speed expressway must not become a "corridor of peril" due to administrative lethargy or infrastructural gaps, and that every avoidable death represents a failure of the State's protective umbrella.
- **Ban on Dhabs and Encroachments:** Construction or operation of any new dhaba, eatery, or commercial structure within the Right of Way (ROW) of any National Highway is prohibited with immediate effect. District Magistrates have been directed to enforce demolition or removal of all unauthorised structures within 60 days under the Control of National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act, 2002. No licence, NOC, or trade approval shall be granted within highway safety zones without prior NHAI or PWD clearance.
- **Emergency Response Infrastructure:** NHAI has been directed to deploy Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulances and recovery cranes at intervals not exceeding 75 km on every National Highway stretch within 60 days. Truck lay-by facilities must be constructed at every 75 km on all National Highways, with priority to the Amritsar-Jamnagar Highway. All Wayside Amenities must include rest areas, food services, washrooms, safe parking, first-aid facilities, and retro-reflective signage visible from 500 metres.
- **Accident Blackspots and Lighting:** MoRTH and NHAI have been directed to identify and publish a comprehensive list of accident blackspots on National Highways within 45 days. A Policy Framework mandating installation of high-intensity LED or high-mast lighting, speed enforcement cameras, retro-reflective warning signs, and transverse bar markings at every blackspot must be issued, with full installation completed within 4 months.
- **District Highway Safety Task Force:** Every district through which a National Highway passes must constitute a District Highway Safety Task Force within 7 days of the order, comprising officers from District Administration, Police, NHAI, PWD, and local bodies. The Task Force shall hold fortnightly review meetings, and State Governments must issue notifications within 60 days prohibiting change of land use within 40 m (residential) and 75 m (commercial) from the mid-point of any National Highway.

INTERNATIONAL

India-Austria Fast-Track Mechanism for Trade Growth

In the News: India and Austria launched a bilateral Fast-Track Mechanism (FTM) during the India–Austria Business Forum held at Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi. The forum coincided with the first official visit by an Austrian Chancellor to India in over four decades, with Federal Chancellor Dr. Christian Stocker leading the Austrian delegation and Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal leading the Indian side.

Key Points:

- **The Fast-Track Mechanism:** A bilateral Fast-Track Mechanism (FTM) was signed and made operational during the forum. It provides a dedicated platform for Austrian companies and investors in India, and Indian companies and investors in Austria, to facilitate investments, address operational issues, and ensure their timely resolution. It will also serve as a forum for sharing suggestions to improve ease of doing business in both countries, strengthening overall investor confidence.
- **India–EU Free Trade Agreement:** A significant portion of the forum's discussions focused on the proposed India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA), viewed as a key enabler for scaling trade, reducing regulatory barriers, and facilitating investment flows. The FTA is expected to create substantial opportunities for labour-intensive industries and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through enhanced market access and improved regulatory frameworks. Both government and industry stakeholders urged businesses — especially MSMEs and innovation-driven enterprises — to prepare proactively for its implementation.
- **Priority Sectors for Cooperation:** Sustainable development, green technologies, and advanced manufacturing were identified as the primary sectors for future India–Austria collaboration, reflecting shared commitments to environmentally responsible and technology-driven growth.

Iran closes Hormuz Strait again over U.S. blockade

In the News: Iran announced the re-closure of the Strait of Hormuz to commercial vessels, citing the continued US blockade of Iranian ports as the reason. The closure came just hours after the strait had briefly reopened following a US-mediated ceasefire, with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) warning that any vessel approaching the strait would be targeted. India summoned the Iranian ambassador after two Indian-flagged merchant vessels were fired upon during the incident.

Key Points:

- **Re-Closure of the Strait:** Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) announced on April 18, 2026, that the Strait of Hormuz had returned to its "previous state" of closure, reversing the brief reopening that had occurred a day earlier following a US-mediated 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon. The IRGC warned that "no vessel is to move from its anchorage in the Persian Gulf or the Sea of Oman" and that approaching the strait would be considered cooperation with the enemy, with offending vessels being targeted.
- **Iran's Stated Reason:** The IRGC attributed the re-closure to the ongoing US blockade of Iranian ports, calling it "acts of piracy and maritime theft." Iran stated that the strait would remain tightly controlled until the US restored full freedom of navigation for vessels travelling to and from Iran.
- **Brief Reopening and Ceasefire Context:** The strait had been briefly reopened on April 17, 2026, after a US-mediated ceasefire deal was reached between Israel and Lebanon. More than a dozen commercial ships had passed through during this window. However, Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) stated that the US naval blockade of Iranian ports — which Washington said it would continue until a final peace deal was reached — constituted a violation of the ceasefire agreement, prompting the re-closure.
- **Attacks on Vessels:** Several vessels were attacked in or near the strait on April 18. Two Iranian gunboats opened fire on a tanker in the strait, as reported by the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO). A container ship was struck by an unknown projectile off the northeastern coast of Oman, and at least two other merchant vessels reported being hit by gunfire while attempting to cross the strait.
- **India's Response:** India's Ministry of External Affairs summoned the Iranian ambassador on April 18, 2026. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri conveyed India's "deep concern" over a shooting incident involving two Indian-flagged merchant ships in the strait. New Delhi urged Iran to resume the process of facilitating India-bound ships across the Strait of Hormuz at the earliest.

- **US Position:** US President Donald Trump stated that Iran could not "blackmail" the US with threats over the waterway and confirmed that the naval blockade of Iranian ports would continue until a final peace deal — including on Iran's nuclear programme — was agreed. Trump indicated that the temporary ceasefire might not be extended and warned that US airstrikes could resume if no deal was reached before April 22, 2026, when the two-week ceasefire was due to expire.

US issues a month- long sanctions waiver on purchase of Russian Oil

In the News: The Trump administration reversed its earlier position and issued a month-long sanctions waiver permitting countries to purchase Russian oil and petroleum products loaded on vessels as of April 17, through May 16, 2026. The decision came just two days after US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had publicly stated that the waiver would not be renewed.

Key Points:

- **The Waiver:** The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the US Department of the Treasury issued a General License permitting most countries to purchase and receive Russian oil and petroleum products loaded on tankers — including sanctioned vessels — on or before April 17, 2026, up until May 16, 2026. The waiver excludes transactions involving Iran, Cuba, and North Korea.
- **The U-Turn:** Just two days before the waiver was issued, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had stated at a White House briefing that the US would not be renewing the sanctions waiver for Russian oil. The reversal is believed to have come after pressure from countries dependent on Russian crude to offset the significant loss of Gulf oil supplies caused by the ongoing US–Israel war on Iran.
- **Previous Waiver:** The waiver renews an earlier one that had expired on April 11, 2026. The sanctions waiver for Russian crude was first issued specifically for India in the first week of March 2026, and was subsequently extended to all other countries.
- **Context — West Asia War and Energy Disruption:** The waivers were introduced as an emergency measure to ease global oil supply disruptions caused by Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz following the US–Israel war on Iran that began on February 28, 2026. Approximately one-fifth of the world's oil passes through the strait, and its effective closure created a major supply crisis. The Trump administration's broader intent was to prevent a sustained spike in international oil prices and the resulting rise in domestic fuel costs in the US ahead of midterm elections.
- **Impact on India:** India, one of the two largest destinations for Russian crude, is a key beneficiary of the extended waiver. Without it, Indian refiners would have been unable to take deliveries of Russian oil on sanctioned tankers or deal directly with sanctioned Russian companies such as Rosneft and Lukoil, risking exposure to US secondary sanctions. India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and meets over 88% of its requirement through imports. In March 2026, India's Russian oil imports nearly doubled to 2 million barrels per day (bpd), accounting for 44.4% of its total oil imports for the month.
- **Iranian Oil Waiver:** A parallel sanctions waiver for Iranian oil, issued on March 20, 2026, allowed approximately 140 million barrels of oil to reach global markets, helping relieve supply pressure during the war. That waiver was set to expire on April 19, 2026, and it remained uncertain whether the US would similarly extend it.

RELOS Pact Comes Into Force: India and Russia Strengthen Military Logistics Cooperation

In the News: The Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) between India and Russia, originally signed in February 2025 and ratified by the Russian Parliament in December 2025, came into force on January 12, 2026, and was operationalized in April 2026. The pact grants both nations mutual access to each other's military bases, ports, and airfields, marking a significant deepening of bilateral defence cooperation and expanding India's strategic reach — particularly into the Arctic region.

Key Points:

- **What is RELOS:** RELOS — Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement — is a bilateral military logistics pact between India and Russia. It provides mutual logistical support and operational flexibility to the armed forces of both nations, enabling on-ground, practical defence cooperation beyond procurement and exercises.
- **Key Provisions of the Pact:** Under RELOS, both countries can deploy up to 3,000 military personnel on each other's territory. The agreement also grants access to army bases, naval ports, and air bases, and permits the deployment of up to 5 warships and 10 fighter aircraft each. The pact is valid for five years with an option for extension.
- **Arctic Access — A Strategic Gain for India:** A major outcome of the pact is India's access to key Russian Arctic ports, including Murmansk and Severomorsk. The Arctic is gaining global strategic importance due to the opening of new shipping routes as polar ice melts, rising great-power competition in the region, and its significance for energy resources and global trade corridors. RELOS positions India as an emerging stakeholder in Arctic geopolitics.
- **Broader India-Russia Defence Ties:** India and Russia share a longstanding strategic partnership encompassing defence procurement and technology transfer, joint military exercises, and geopolitical coordination. RELOS elevates this partnership by enabling operational-level support and real-time logistical interoperability between the two militaries.
- **India's Logistics Pacts — Broader Pattern:** RELOS is part of India's broader strategy of signing logistics agreements with key partners. India has similar pacts with the United States (LEMOA — Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement), France (MLSA), and Australia (MLSA), collectively aimed at enhancing India's global military reach and rapid deployment capabilities.

After Years of Turmoil, Bulgaria Gets Clear Mandate in 2026 Elections

In the News: Bulgaria held its eighth parliamentary election in five years. Former President Rumen Radev and his party, Progressive Bulgaria, won a landslide victory with approximately 44.7% of the vote — the biggest result for a single party since 1997 — raising hopes of an end to the country's prolonged cycle of political instability and short-lived coalition governments.

Key Points:

- **Landslide Victory:** Progressive Bulgaria secured around 44.7% of the vote, giving Radev an absolute majority in the 240-seat parliament — estimated at 130–132 seats. This is the first time any single political force has achieved an outright majority in Bulgaria since 1997. Voter turnout rose significantly from 39% in 2024 to approximately 50%.
- **Who is Rumen Radev:** Radev is a former air force general who served as Bulgaria's President for nine years before stepping down in January 2026 to contest parliamentary elections. He positioned himself as an outsider and anti-corruption champion, criticising what he called the "oligarchic governance model" in Bulgaria. His party attracted support from Gen-Z voters, middle-aged voters, the elderly, and a large share of the overseas Bulgarian diaspora.
- **Collapse of Established Parties:** The election drastically reduced the number of parties in parliament from nine to five. The previously dominant center-right GERB party, led by three-time Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, fell below 20% for the first time in its history, finishing at 13.4%. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) failed to cross the 4% threshold entirely — the first time it has been out of parliament since Bulgaria's first democratic elections in 1990 after communism.
- **Background — Years of Instability:** Since 2021, Bulgaria has been trapped in a cycle of frequent elections, coalition failures, and government collapses. Mass protests erupted in December 2025 against Borissov and Delyan Peevski, leader of the DPS party, who were accused of enabling systemic corruption. The US and UK have imposed sanctions on Peevski for alleged corruption.
- **Vote-Buying Crackdown:** The run-up to the election saw a major crackdown on electoral malpractice. The Bulgarian Interior Ministry seized over €1.2 million earmarked for vote-buying and detained over more than 400 suspected vote buyers. DPS and GERB ranked first and second respectively in official reports of vote-buying.



India and South Korea Announce 25 Key Outcomes After High-Level Talks in New Delhi

In the News: South Korean President Lee Jae-myung arrived in New Delhi on a three-day state visit to India. Following high-level talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Hyderabad House, both countries elevated their bilateral relationship to a "Futuristic Partnership" and announced 25 key outcomes spanning trade, technology, defence, energy, and culture. PM Modi set an ambitious target to grow India-South Korea bilateral trade from \$27 billion to \$50 billion by 2030.

Key Points:

- **Upgrade to Futuristic Partnership:** India and South Korea elevated their existing Special Strategic Partnership to a "Futuristic Partnership," anchored by a Joint Strategic Vision document. The framework focuses on expanding cooperation in shipbuilding, maritime logistics, sustainability, energy security, and emerging technologies, with the aim of building a resilient and future-ready bilateral relationship.
- **Trade and Economic Cooperation:** Both countries have set a target to double bilateral trade from the current \$27 billion to \$50 billion by 2030. Key measures to achieve this include resuming negotiations to upgrade the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), establishing an India-Korea Financial Forum, and a proposal for setting up a dedicated Korean Industrial Township in India under the National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC).
- **MoUs and Key Agreements:** A wide range of Memorandums of Understanding were signed covering ports and maritime infrastructure, steel and supply chain resilience, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), science, technology and innovation, climate action and sustainability, and cultural and creative industries. A landmark India-Korea Digital Bridge was also announced, focused on collaboration in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and information technology.
- **Financial Sector Engagement:** Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met Lee Eog-weon, Chairman of South Korea's Financial Services Commission, to discuss fintech innovation, digital payments, investment flows, and local currency settlement mechanisms. Both sides explored collaboration through India's GIFT City International Financial Services Centre and the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).
- **Commerce and Industry Talks:** Union Minister Piyush Goyal held meetings at Bharat Mandapam with CEOs from major South Korean firms including Mirae Asset, Naver, and Krafton, focusing on investment, innovation, and emerging technologies. Goyal also met Kim Jung-Kwan to discuss creating a more balanced trade relationship and encouraging greater Korean investment in India.
- **New Dialogues and Global Initiatives:** Both countries launched an Economic Security Dialogue to strengthen cooperation on critical technologies and supply chains. South Korea joined India-led initiatives — the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative — while India agreed to join the Global Green Growth Institute. Enhanced engagement was also announced on climate change, arctic cooperation, and maritime security.

Trump extends Iran ceasefire: What Pakistan stands to gain, what it means for India

In the News: US President Donald Trump extended the US-Iran ceasefire indefinitely, hours before it was set to expire, citing the need to give Iran's leadership time to present a unified proposal. In his announcement, Trump specifically credited Pakistan — naming Field Marshal Asim Munir and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif — for requesting the extension, significantly boosting Pakistan's profile as a diplomatic mediator in the conflict.

Key Points:

- **Background — Pakistan as Mediator:** Pakistan has been actively mediating between the US and Iran since the ceasefire was first announced approximately two weeks before the extension. Iran's leadership had previously thanked PM Sharif and Field Marshal Munir for their efforts. The second round of US-Iran negotiations was set to take place in Islamabad, reflecting Pakistan's central role in the diplomatic process.

- **Why Pakistan Wants the War to End — Economic Reasons:** Pakistan's economy is heavily dependent on fuel imports routed through the Strait of Hormuz. The ongoing conflict has already triggered a fuel crisis, forcing work-from-home policies in offices and schools across the country. Millions of Pakistanis working in Gulf countries send home vital remittances that support the domestic economy. Pakistan is also currently on an IMF loan programme that requires it to maintain minimum foreign currency reserves — higher oil import costs directly erode these reserves.
- **Why Pakistan Wants the War to End — Geopolitical Reasons:** Pakistan shares a 900-km border with Iran and maintains strong ties with Gulf countries that Iran has attacked, particularly Saudi Arabia, with whom Pakistan has a defence pact. China, another major benefactor of Pakistan, is also suffering economic losses due to the war. Pakistan seeks neither a weakened Iran — which would cause instability on its border — nor an emboldened one — which would upset Gulf equations and harm Saudi Arabia.
- **Risks for Pakistan:** Experts caution that with an unpredictable partner like Trump, the talks could collapse, leaving Pakistan to share the blame. There are also concerns within Pakistan that the country is acting more as a US proxy than a neutral mediator — an impression that could fuel domestic opposition. If the US is seen as betraying Iran again, Pakistan's position as a credible mediator could become untenable.
- **The "Hybrid Regime" Factor:** The mediation has been seen as a success of Pakistan's hybrid civil-military governance model. PM Sharif has handled diplomacy with Gulf and regional countries, while Field Marshal Munir — who, in his previous role at the ISI, had extensive dealings with Iran — managed Washington. Analysts note that Munir's intelligence background gave him credibility with Trump and deep knowledge of the Iranian leadership.

90% of World Heritage Sites in Danger? UNESCO Report Raises Alarm

In the News: The UNESCO People and Nature Report, released in April 2026, found that nearly 90 percent of UNESCO-designated sites including World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves, and Global Geoparks are currently experiencing high levels of environmental stress, with climate change recorded as a threat across 98 percent of all such sites.

Key Points:

- **About the Report:** The UNESCO People and Nature Report is the first comprehensive assessment covering all UNESCO site categories, spanning a network of more than 2,260 sites across over 13 million square kilometres, an area larger than China and India combined.
- **Climate Change as Primary Threat:** Climate change impacts have been recorded at 98 percent of UNESCO-designated sites since 2000, with extreme heat identified as the most widespread hazard, followed by heavy rainfall, rising sea levels, and coral bleaching. Extreme weather events including droughts, floods, and wildfires have increased by 40 percent in the past decade.
- **Glacier and Ocean Loss:** Glacier loss across UNESCO sites has exceeded 2,500 gigatonnes of ice since 2000, with mountain glaciers losing around 9 percent of their volume. Oceans within these sites have also become measurably more acidic compared to 2000 levels.
- **Wildfires and Forest Loss:** Wildfires have emerged as the leading driver of forest change in World Heritage sites, ahead of logging, agricultural clearance, and infrastructure development. Since 2000, more than 300,000 square kilometres of tree cover has been lost, and invasive species have been recorded in over 80 percent of UNESCO-designated sites.
- **Risk of Irreversible Tipping Points:** The report warns that more than a quarter of UNESCO-designated sites could reach critical and potentially irreversible tipping points by 2050. One of the gravest risks is the collapse of tropical coral reef ecosystems, where annual bleaching events could lead to their functional disappearance.
- **Water and Carbon Stress:** Over 300 World Heritage sites already face chronic water stress, threatening freshwater ecosystems. Declining forest carbon stocks risk turning some carbon sinks into net carbon sources, worsening global climate change.
- **Biodiversity Buffer Role:** Despite mounting pressures, UNESCO sites continue to act as critical buffers against biodiversity loss. Habitat degradation within these areas has been about half as severe as in surrounding landscapes.

over the past 50 years. While global wildlife populations have declined by approximately 73 percent since 1970, populations within UNESCO sites have remained stable.

China Selects Pakistani Astronauts for Tiangong Mission

In the News: China's Manned Space Agency announced the selection of two Pakistani astronauts, Muhammad Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud, as candidates for a future crewed mission to the Tiangong space station, marking a landmark moment in China-Pakistan space cooperation and potentially making one of them the first foreign astronaut aboard Tiangong and the first Pakistani to reach Earth's orbit.

Key Points:

- **Selection Announcement:** The China Manned Space Agency announced that Muhammad Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud cleared multiple rounds of selection and will travel to China for advanced specialised astronaut training. After completing all required courses and assessments, one will be chosen as a payload specialist for a future Tiangong mission.
- **Historic First for Pakistan:** If the mission proceeds successfully, the selected astronaut would become the first Pakistani national to enter Earth's orbit and potentially the first foreign astronaut to visit China's Tiangong space station, marking a historic milestone for Pakistan's space programme and South Asian participation in human spaceflight.
- **Role of Payload Specialist:** The selected astronaut will serve as a payload specialist, a role focused on managing scientific experiments, technology testing, and mission-specific research tasks aboard the space station, rather than spacecraft operations.
- **Bilateral Agreement:** The selection follows a formal agreement signed in February 2025 between the China Manned Space Agency and Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), covering astronaut selection, training, scientific experiments, and broader space mission cooperation.
- **About SUPARCO:** SUPARCO, or the Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission, is Pakistan's national space agency and the nodal body for bilateral cooperation with China in this mission.
- **About Tiangong Space Station:** Tiangong is China's independently operated modular space station in low Earth orbit. China became the third country in the world to independently send humans into space, after Russia and the United States.

EU Approves €90 Billion Ukraine Aid and Russia Sanctions

In the News: The European Union approved a €90 billion financial assistance package for Ukraine along with its 20th round of sanctions against Russia, after Hungary withdrew its long-standing objections. The decisions were backed by ambassadors from all 27 EU member states, ending months of deadlock and reinforcing European unity in support of Kyiv.

Key Points:

- **Approval of Aid Package:** The EU approved a €90 billion financial assistance package for Ukraine covering the years 2026 and 2027. Nearly half of the amount is earmarked for defence requirements, while the remaining funds will support public services, salaries, pensions, and broader economic stability as Ukraine continues to face severe wartime financial pressure.
- **20th Round of Sanctions on Russia:** Alongside the aid package, the EU also cleared its 20th sanctions package against Russia. The new measures are aimed at increasing economic restrictions on Moscow and reducing its capacity to sustain the ongoing war effort, as part of the EU's long-term strategy of maintaining diplomatic and financial pressure on Russia.
- **Hungary's Earlier Blockade:** Hungary, led by outgoing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, had blocked both the Ukraine aid package and the new sanctions. Budapest cited concerns over disruptions in Russian oil supplies through the Druzhba

Pipeline, a critical energy route for Hungary and Slovakia that had been affected by Russian attacks on Ukrainian transit infrastructure.

- **About the Druzhba Pipeline:** The Druzhba Pipeline is one of the longest oil pipelines in the world and supplies Russian crude oil to several European countries. Hungary and Slovakia remain heavily dependent on this pipeline for their energy needs, making its disruption a major political concern for Budapest.
- **Resolution of Deadlock:** The breakthrough came as Hungary softened its resistance following restoration of oil transit, growing diplomatic pressure from other EU member states, and changing political conditions domestically, with Viktor Orbán's influence weakening amid leadership transition discussions.
- **Unanimous Requirement for EU Sanctions:** All European Union sanctions require unanimous approval from all 27 member states. Hungary's earlier veto had therefore been sufficient to block both the aid package and the sanctions round, underscoring the structural challenge of maintaining bloc-wide consensus on foreign policy.

UK Tobacco and Vapes Bill Explained: Ban for Those Born After 2009

In the News: The UK Parliament has passed the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, banning the sale of tobacco to anyone born on or after January 1, 2009. The bill completed its passage through both Houses of Parliament on April 21, 2026, and is set to receive Royal Assent and become law the following week. The legislation is aimed at creating a smoke-free generation and is considered one of the toughest anti-smoking measures in the world.

Key Points:

- **The Bill and Its Core Provision:** The Tobacco and Vapes Bill permanently bans the legal sale of tobacco products to anyone born on or after January 1, 2009, across the United Kingdom. This means that this generation will never legally be able to purchase tobacco, regardless of their age in future years.
- **Legislative Journey:** The bill was introduced in the House of Commons on November 5, 2024. It completed its parliamentary journey on April 21, 2026, when the House of Lords approved amendments made by Members of Parliament, after which it was sent for Royal Assent.
- **Public Health Rationale:** Smoking causes approximately 400,000 hospital admissions and 64,000 deaths per year in England alone. It costs the National Health Service (NHS) £3 billion annually in treatments for tobacco-related illnesses such as cancer and heart disease, with total societal costs estimated between £21.3 billion and £27.6 billion per year, largely due to lost productivity.
- **Extended Smoking Bans:** The legislation also grants ministers the power to expand existing restrictions on smoking in public places. The ban will now extend to children's playgrounds and areas outside schools and hospitals.
- **Regulation of Vapes and Nicotine Products:** The bill additionally prohibits vapes and nicotine products from being branded, promoted, or advertised in ways that target children, to prevent nicotine addiction among young people.
- **Concerns from the Vaping Industry:** Some vaping firms have raised concerns that overly restrictive measures on flavours and product availability could push former smokers who had switched to vaping back toward tobacco, or drive them toward unregulated markets.

ICC Confirms Trial Against Rodrigo Duterte

In the News: The International Criminal Court (ICC) has confirmed charges of crimes against humanity against former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, clearing the way for a full trial. The case is linked to Duterte's controversial "war on drugs" and is regarded as one of the most significant international criminal proceedings involving a former Asian head of state in recent years.

Key Points:

- **Charges Confirmed:** ICC pre-trial judges have confirmed that there are substantial grounds to believe Duterte committed crimes against humanity. The charges relate to extrajudicial killings carried out between 2011 and 2019,

spanning his tenure as Mayor of Davao City and subsequently as President of the Philippines. More than 500 victims have been authorised to participate in the proceedings.

- **Nature of Allegations:** Prosecutors allege that thousands of people were killed as part of Duterte's anti-drug campaign. Human rights groups have described the killings as systematic and unlawful, carried out under the guise of law enforcement during anti-drug operations.
- **Jurisdiction Dispute:** Duterte has challenged the ICC's authority to try him, citing the Philippines' withdrawal from the Rome Statute in 2019. However, ICC judges ruled that the court retains jurisdiction because the alleged crimes occurred between 2011 and 2019, when the Philippines was still a member. This ruling establishes the important legal principle that withdrawal from the Rome Statute does not erase accountability for crimes committed during the period of membership.
- **Fitness to Stand Trial:** Duterte's legal team argued that the 81-year-old former president was medically unfit to participate in trial proceedings due to cognitive impairment. The ICC judges rejected this argument after reviewing expert medical opinions, concluding that Duterte remains fit to understand the proceedings and exercise his legal rights.
- **Duterte's Defence:** Duterte has strongly denied all allegations, calling the charges false and politically motivated. Philippine police have similarly maintained that officers involved in anti-drug operations acted solely in self-defence.

Finland Builds World's First Permanent Nuclear Waste Vault

In the News: Finland has become the first country in the world to begin operating a permanent deep geological repository for high-level nuclear waste, known as **Onkalo** (meaning "cave" or "hollow" in Finnish), located at Olkiluoto on Finland's southwestern coast. The facility is designed to safely store spent nuclear fuel for up to 100,000 years.

Key Points:

- **What is Onkalo:** Onkalo is the world's first permanent nuclear waste disposal facility, built approximately 400–500 metres underground in stable bedrock. It is designed to isolate high-level radioactive waste from the biosphere for tens of thousands of years without requiring active human monitoring.
- **Developer:** The repository is developed and operated by **Posiva Oy**, a company jointly owned by Finnish nuclear power companies **Teollisuuden Voima (TVO)** and **Fortum**. Finland's **Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (STUK)** oversees regulatory approval.
- **Storage Method:** Spent nuclear fuel rods are first sealed inside **cast-iron inserts** placed within **copper canisters**, which are then surrounded by **bentonite clay** buffers before being deposited in tunnels drilled into the bedrock — a multi-barrier containment system.
- **Why Finland:** Finland's geological choice is significant — the Olkiluoto bedrock is among the most geologically stable on Earth, with minimal seismic activity, making it ideal for long-term containment. Finland's stable **democratic governance** and strong institutional framework (highlighted in its 2000 Constitution) also made long-term nuclear planning feasible.
- **Connection to Finland's Energy Policy:** Finland operates nuclear power as a key part of its low-carbon energy mix. As a member of the **European Union (since 1995)** and a country committed to sustainability and circular economy principles, the Onkalo project aligns with Finland's broader environmental leadership.
- **Timeline:** The facility is expected to begin receiving spent fuel deposits in the **mid-2020s**, with the repository eventually sealed permanently after filling over several decades.

Upendra Dwivedi Inducted into US Army War College International Hall of Fame

In the News: Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi was inducted into the International Hall of Fame of the US Army War College, becoming only the third Indian Army officer to receive this distinguished honour, after General V. K. Singh and General Bikram Singh.

Key Points:

- **Induction into Hall of Fame:** General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of the Indian Army, was formally inducted into the International Hall of Fame of the US Army War College. He is the third Indian military officer to receive this honour, following former Army Chiefs General V. K. Singh and General Bikram Singh.
- **About the US Army War College:** The US Army War College is a premier institution for senior military education in the United States, focused on strategic leadership, national security studies, and professional military development. Its International Hall of Fame recognises distinguished foreign military leaders who have made significant contributions to global security and bilateral defence cooperation.
- **General Dwivedi's Background:** General Upendra Dwivedi is an alumnus of the US Army War College, making his induction into its Hall of Fame particularly significant. He currently serves as the Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army.
- **Engagements During the Visit:** During his visit to the college, General Dwivedi addressed faculty members and international student officers on themes of leadership, professional military education, and evolving global security dynamics. He also participated in panel discussions, toured key facilities of the institution, and reviewed advanced study projects under the college's Scholars Program.

A sweeping new H-1B Bill has raised alarm. What does it mean for Indian students and working professionals?

In the News: Congressman Eli Crane of the United States introduced the 'End H-1B Visa Abuse Act of 2026' on April 22, 2026, proposing sweeping restrictions on the H-1B skilled worker visa programme. The Bill has raised significant alarm among Indian students and professionals, who form the largest share of both H-1B recipients and student visa holders in the US.

Key Points:

- **The Bill's Key Proposals:** The End H-1B Visa Abuse Act of 2026 proposes a three-year pause on new H-1B visas, a reduction in annual visa caps to 25,000, a minimum salary threshold of \$200,000, elimination of the Optional Practical Training (OPT) programme, and a ban on transitioning from H-1B status to permanent residency (green cards). Immigration lawyers have described it as a near-total reset of the US skilled migration system.
- **What Makes This Bill Unprecedented:** Unlike earlier immigration Bills that targeted one or two elements such as caps or wages, this proposal simultaneously seeks to restructure the entire skilled migration pipeline — covering visas, work experience programmes, salary floors, and permanent residency pathways — in one sweeping legislation.
- **Impact on Indian Students — OPT Elimination:** The Optional Practical Training (OPT) programme currently serves as the crucial bridge between completing education on an F-1 student visa and transitioning to H-1B employment. Eliminating OPT would sever this pathway entirely, effectively making US education a dead end for most Indian students seeking long-term career opportunities in the country. Lawyers warn that this could push Indian students toward Canada, the UK, Australia, and Germany, which are actively competing for global talent.
- **Impact on Indian Professionals — Salary Threshold:** The proposed \$200,000 minimum salary requirement, combined with a shift from lottery to wage-based selection, would disproportionately disadvantage early- and mid-career Indian professionals. Critics argue the system would favour candidates from wealthy large firms over genuinely skilled workers employed by startups, academic institutions, or healthcare organisations where salary structures are lower.
- **Most Vulnerable Group — Green Card Backlog:** Indians already stuck in employment-based green card queues — some waiting 10 to 20 years — face the gravest risk. A provision blocking adjustment of status would strip them of benefits they have been lawfully accruing over decades. Lawyers have flagged that such retroactive provisions could raise serious constitutional concerns related to due process and equal protection.

India-Uzbekistan Joint Military Exercise 'Dustlik' 7th Edition Concludes in Uzbekistan

In the News: The 7th edition of the India-Uzbekistan Joint Military Exercise 'Dustlik 2026' culminated successfully at the Gurumsaray Field Training Area in Namangan, Uzbekistan. The two-week intensive exercise enhanced interoperability and joint operational capability of both nations in semi-mountainous terrain, with a focus on counter-terrorism operations.

Key Points:

- **Exercise & Venue:** Dustlik 2026 was held at the Gurumsaray Field Training Area, Namangan, Uzbekistan. The word "Dustlik" means friendship in Uzbek, reflecting the spirit of the bilateral engagement. It is conducted alternately in India and Uzbekistan; the previous (6th) edition was held in Aundh, Pune, India in 2025.
- **Participation:** A total of 120 personnel participated — 60 from each side. The Indian contingent comprised 45 personnel from the Indian Army and 15 from the Indian Air Force. Uzbekistan was represented by personnel from its Army and Air Force.
- **Key Objectives:** The exercise aimed to strengthen military cooperation and enhance the ability to conduct joint operations in semi-mountainous terrain, with emphasis on physical fitness, coordinated planning, joint tactical drills, and special arms skills.
- **Operational Structure:** In the concluding phase, six operational phases were structured and rehearsed in detail. Troops were organised into specialised groups covering reconnaissance, airborne operations, surveillance, helicopter firing, house intervention, and reserve elements comprising engineer and medical detachments.
- **Counter-Terrorism Focus:** The exercise enhanced preparedness for joint operations to neutralise unlawful armed groups and provided an opportunity for both sides to exchange best practices in counter-terrorism tactics and procedures.

World Malaria Day 2026

In the News: Ahead of World Malaria Day on April 25, 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO) prequalified artemether-lumefantrine, the first-ever antimalarial treatment developed specifically for newborns and young infants weighing between two and five kilograms — marking a landmark step in addressing one of the most underserved patient groups in global health.

Key Points:

- **First-Ever Infant Malaria Treatment:** WHO granted prequalification to artemether-lumefantrine, the first antimalarial formulation designed specifically for newborns and young infants (2–5 kg). Previously, infants were treated with formulations meant for older children, raising risks of dosing errors, side effects, and toxicity.
- **WHO Approves First Malaria Drug for Newborns:** This marks the first time in history that a malaria treatment has been formally approved and prequalified exclusively for newborns and young infants — a patient group that had long been overlooked in antimalarial drug development. The approval addresses a critical gap, as around 30 million babies are born each year in malaria-endemic areas of Africa with no age-appropriate treatment previously available.
- **New Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs) Prequalified:** On April 14, 2026, WHO also prequalified three new RDTs that detect the pf-LDH protein instead of the HRP2 protein. Some malaria parasite strains have lost the gene producing HRP2, making them invisible to conventional tests — causing up to 80% of cases to be missed in parts of the Horn of Africa.
- **WHO Recommendation on Diagnostic Switching:** WHO now recommends that countries switch to the new pf-LDH-based RDTs when more than 5% of malaria cases are being missed due to pf-hrp2 gene deletions, ensuring accurate diagnosis and timely treatment.
- **World Malaria Day 2026 Campaign:** WHO and partners launched the 2026 World Malaria Day campaign themed "Driven to End Malaria: Now We Can. Now We Must." — a call to action to sustain political commitment and financial investment in malaria elimination.
- **Global Malaria Burden (2024):** According to the World Malaria Report 2025, there were an estimated 282 million malaria cases and 610,000 deaths in 2024 — a rise from 2023 — signalling that global progress is stalling amid drug resistance, insecticide resistance, diagnostic failures, and cuts in international aid.



SCIENCE AND TECH

Blue Origin Achieves First Successful Landing of Reused New Glenn Booster

In the News: Jeff Bezos' space company Blue Origin successfully landed the reused booster of its New Glenn rocket after its third mission launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida — marking the first-ever landing of a reused New Glenn booster and a significant milestone in the company's bid to compete with Elon Musk's SpaceX Falcon 9 in the heavy-lift rocket market. However, the mission's primary payload, AST SpaceMobile's BlueBird 7 satellite, failed to reach its intended orbit.

Key Points:

- **About New Glenn:** New Glenn is Blue Origin's 30-story heavy-lift rocket featuring a seven-metre (23-foot) nose cone capable of carrying bulkier payloads, including multiple satellites in a single mission. Sunday's launch was its third mission overall.
- **The Reused Booster Milestone:** The booster, nicknamed "Never Tell Me the Odds" — a reference to Han Solo's line in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* — had previously flown on the NG-2 mission in November 2025 and was successfully recovered. Its successful landing on this third mission marks the first time Blue Origin has demonstrated reliable booster reuse for New Glenn.
- **Payload Failure:** New Glenn carried AST SpaceMobile's BlueBird 7 satellite — part of its next-generation Block 2 constellation and reportedly featuring the largest commercial communications array deployed in low-Earth orbit. However, the rocket's upper stage placed the satellite into a lower-than-planned orbit. Since the altitude was too low for the satellite's onboard thruster technology to sustain operations, it will be de-orbited.
- **AST SpaceMobile's Broader Mission:** AST SpaceMobile is working to build a space-based cellular broadband network designed to connect directly with smartphones — similar to Amazon's LEO or SpaceX's Starlink. The company is currently in production through BlueBird 32, with BlueBird 8 to 10 expected to be ready in approximately 30 days.
- **SpaceX vs. Blue Origin Rivalry:** Both companies are competing to build NASA's lunar landers for the Artemis programme. SpaceX is developing a Starship-based Human Landing System, while Blue Origin is working on the Blue Moon lander and aims to achieve an uncrewed soft lunar landing (Mark 1) this summer.

Indigenous 1000-kg Aerial Bomb for IAF

In the News: India's Ministry of Defence has issued an Expression of Interest (EoI) for the indigenous design, development, and procurement of 1,000-kg aerial bombs — similar to the US military's MK-84 general-purpose bomb — for the Indian Air Force (IAF), as part of the government's broader push for self-reliance in defence manufacturing.

Key Points:

- **Background:** The IAF currently procures MK-84 class general-purpose bombs from foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). The new initiative aims to replace this dependency with an indigenously designed and manufactured equivalent.
- **Nature of the Bomb:** The proposed munition is described as a natural fragmentation, high-calibre aerial bomb capable of generating high blast effect and significant peak over-pressure (PoP) against enemy targets, broadly equivalent to the US MK-84 from the Mark 80 series.
- **Procurement Framework:** The project will be executed under the Make-II (industry-funded) sub-category of the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, followed by procurement under the Buy (Indian IDDM — Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) category. A total of 600 such aerial bombs are planned to be procured under this category.
- **Two-Stage Project Plan:** Stage 1 covers the design and development of six prototypes — both live and inert — along with tail assemblies and associated equipment. Stage 2 involves procurement, beginning with the issuance of a commercial Request for Proposal (RFP) to shortlisted development agencies.

- **Indigenisation Requirement:** The development phase mandates a minimum of 50% indigenous content, in line with the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision for the defence sector.
- **Timeline and Participation:** The estimated timeline from EoI issuance to contract signing is approximately 2.5 years, covering prototype development, user trials, evaluation, and commercial processes. Indian private defence contractors are eligible to participate, with provisions for foreign collaboration through joint ventures, technology transfer, or commercial off-the-shelf arrangements.

ENVIRONMENT

Sundarbans Under Microplastics Threat

In the News: A study by the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Kolkata, has revealed that microplastics are severely disrupting the food web and altering the carbon cycle in the Sundarbans — the world's largest contiguous mangrove forest. The findings raise serious concerns about the long-term health of this critical blue-carbon ecosystem located on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers along the Bay of Bengal.

Key Points:

- **Alarming Pollution Levels:** High concentrations of microplastics were found in the Mooriganga estuary near Sagar Island. Microplastic levels surged by approximately 40% during the monsoon season, as heavy rainfall washes urban waste, colourless fragments, and weathered plastics from inland areas into the delta through rivers and drains.
- **Sources of Microplastics:** Around half of the identified plastics were fibres, likely from textiles, followed by fragments. The most common materials found were polypropylene (used in packaging) and polyethylene terephthalate or PET (used in water bottles).
- **Formation of Plastispheres:** High-resolution imaging revealed that plastics in the Sundarbans are weathering, cracking, and breaking down into nanoplastics. These cracks host complex communities of bacteria and microbes, collectively known as "plastispheres."
- **Disruption of Carbon Cycle:** Since plastics are roughly 90% carbon, they are acting as artificial carbon sinks. As they degrade, they leach Dissolved Organic Carbon (DOC) into the water, which acts as an artificial food source for marine bacteria, causing them to multiply rapidly beyond natural levels and accelerating carbon cycling in unnatural ways.
- **Threat to Blue Carbon Efficiency:** Mangroves are highly efficient at capturing and storing atmospheric CO₂, making the Sundarbans a vital blue-carbon ecosystem. Researchers warn that artificial carbon introduction from plastics and the resulting microbial bloom could disrupt natural carbon cycles, making the Sundarbans less effective as a carbon sink.
- **What are Microplastics and Nanoplastics:** Microplastics are plastic fragments, fibres, or granules less than 5 mm in length. Nanoplastics are their further breakdown products, measuring less than 1 micrometre. Primary microplastics are intentionally manufactured small (e.g., microbeads in scrubs and toothpaste). Secondary microplastics form from the environmental breakdown of larger plastic items due to UV radiation, ocean waves, and temperature changes.
- **Environmental Impact — Bioaccumulation and "Trojan Horse" Effect:** Marine life from zooplankton to whales mistake microplastics for food. Once ingested, plastics block digestive tracts and accumulate up the food chain through biomagnification. Plastics also act as chemical sponges, absorbing toxic pollutants such as heavy metals and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), delivering concentrated doses of toxins to animals that ingest them.

India Adds 99th Ramsar Site with Inclusion of Shekha Jheel in Uttar Pradesh

In the News: Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced the designation of Shekha Jheel Bird Sanctuary in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, as India's 99th Ramsar site, bringing the country closer to the milestone of 100 designated wetlands and taking Uttar Pradesh's tally to 12, the highest among all Indian states.

Key Points:

- **99th Ramsar Site:** Shekha Jheel Bird Sanctuary in Aligarh district, Uttar Pradesh, has been officially designated as a Ramsar site, taking India's total to 99. India now has the highest number of Ramsar sites in Asia and the third highest globally, after the UK (176) and Mexico (144).
- **About Shekha Jheel:** The site is a partially human-made wetland complex comprising Shekha Jheel Lake and surrounding deciduous forest, formed following the construction of the Upper Ganges Canal in the 1850s. It has also been designated an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) by BirdLife International.
- **Ecological Significance:** The sanctuary serves as a crucial stopover on the Central Asian Flyway, one of the world's most important migratory bird routes. It provides vital winter habitat for migratory birds including the Bar-headed Goose, Painted Stork, and various species of ducks.
- **Biodiversity Beyond Birds:** The wetland also supports three threatened turtle species, namely the Black Pond Turtle, Indian Flap-shelled Turtle, and Ganges Soft-shelled Turtle, underlining its importance for broader aquatic biodiversity.
- **Uttar Pradesh Leads:** With 12 Ramsar sites, Uttar Pradesh now holds the highest number of Ramsar-designated wetlands among all Indian states, reflecting the state's growing ecological importance and conservation commitments.
- **India's Ramsar Growth:** India's count of Ramsar sites has grown from 26 to 99 in the past 11 years, with 57 sites added in the last four years alone, reflecting a significant acceleration in wetland conservation efforts under recent environmental policy.
- **About the Ramsar Convention:** The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty adopted in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, providing a framework for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. It currently has 172 member countries and covers nearly 2,594 designated wetland sites globally.

Satellite Study Places Mumbai and Secunderabad Landfills in Global Methane Top 25

In the News: A satellite-based global study published in April 2026 revealed that landfill sites in Secunderabad, Telangana and Mumbai, Maharashtra rank among the world's top 25 methane-emitting waste sites for 2025, raising serious concerns about India's waste management practices and their contribution to climate change.

Key Points:

- **The Study:** The analysis was conducted using satellite data processed by Carbon Mapper, an independent non-profit, and examined by the Stop Methane Project (SPM) at the University of California, Los Angeles. It tracked methane plumes from January 1 to December 31, 2025, identifying the highest-emitting landfill sites globally.
- **Scale of the Analysis:** The study examined more than 2,994 methane plumes across 707 waste sites worldwide, including landfills and dumpsites, to map major global pollution hotspots.
- **India's Position:** India has two landfill sites among the global top 25 emitters — in Secunderabad and Mumbai. Chile and Brazil led with three sites each, while India stands alongside Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the rankings.
- **Responsible Operators:** The report linked the Secunderabad site to Ramky Enviro Engineers and the Mumbai site to Antony Waste Handling Cell Ltd, based on publicly available government records. Official responses from both companies were awaited at the time of publication.
- **Why Methane Is Dangerous:** Methane is a potent greenhouse gas that remains in the atmosphere for about 12 years but is approximately 86 times more effective at trapping heat than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), methane is responsible for nearly 30% of the rise in global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution, with current atmospheric concentrations about 2.5 times higher than pre-industrial levels.
- **How Landfills Emit Methane:** Organic waste such as food, paper, and garden material decomposes without oxygen inside landfills, generating methane as a byproduct. Unmanaged or poorly managed landfills can become major emission sources.
- **India's Earlier Record:** Delhi's Ghazipur landfill had previously been identified as a methane "super-emitter." A single leak event in April 2022 released over 400 tonnes of methane per hour — equivalent to emissions from around 68 million cars simultaneously.

AWARDS

Dr. Ch. Srinivasa Rao Receives Prestigious Prof. M.S. Swaminathan Award 2026 in Hyderabad

In the News: Dr. Ch. Srinivasa Rao, Director and Vice-Chancellor of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), was conferred the 9th Prof. M.S. Swaminathan Award at a ceremony held in Hyderabad, in recognition of his pioneering contributions to climate-resilient agriculture and natural resource management.

Key Points:

- **About the Award:** The Prof. M.S. Swaminathan Award is instituted by the Retired ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research) Employees Association in collaboration with Nuziveedu Seeds Limited. It recognizes scientists who have made significant contributions to food security and sustainable agriculture in India.
- **Awardee's Work:** Dr. Rao has been instrumental in advancing resource conservation technologies, developing district-level contingency plans for climate risks, promoting adoption of sustainable farming practices across millions of hectares, and improving soil health and water management strategies across India.
- **Special Significance in 2026:** The 2026 edition of the award coincides with the birth centenary of Prof. M.S. Swaminathan, widely regarded as the architect of India's Green Revolution, who transformed the country from food scarcity to self-sufficiency. Honoring Dr. Rao in this milestone year symbolizes the national shift from the Green Revolution to Climate-Resilient Agriculture.
- **Eminent Attendees:** The award ceremony was attended by several prominent personalities, including former Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu, Tummala Nageswara Rao, Mandava Prabhakar Rao, and Vidya Sagar Rao, underscoring the national importance of agricultural innovation.
- **Broader Relevance for CLAT:** This event connects to themes of food security, sustainable development, climate adaptation, and India's agricultural policy — all recurring areas in CLAT General Knowledge and Current Affairs sections.

Goldman Environmental Prize 2026 Honours First All-Women Cohort of Environmental Leaders

In the News: The Goldman Environmental Foundation announced the recipients of the 2026 Goldman Environmental Prize at a ceremony in San Francisco during Earth Week. For the first time in the prize's 37-year history since its founding in 1989, all six winners are women, representing six regions of the world — Africa, Asia, Europe, Islands and Island Nations, North America, and South and Central America.

Key Points:

- **About the Prize:** The Goldman Environmental Prize, often called the "Green Nobel," was founded in 1989 by San Francisco philanthropists Richard and Rhoda Goldman. It is awarded annually to one grassroots environmental activist from each of the world's six primary regions. Each winner receives \$200,000 in prize money. To date, the prize has honoured 239 winners from 98 nations.
- **Historic First — All-Women Cohort:** The 2026 edition marks the first year all six recipients are women. The foundation noted that women and girls face disproportionately harsh impacts from environmental crises and climate change, often taking on roles as caretakers and problem-solvers in the aftermath of disasters.
- **Africa — Iroko Tanshi (Nigeria):** Tanshi rediscovered the endangered short-tailed roundleaf bat and identified human-induced wildfires as the main threat to its habitat at the Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary. Between early 2022 and May 2025, she led community fire brigades that responded to over 70 fire outbreaks, preventing any serious wildfires in and around the sanctuary.
- **Asia — Borim Kim (South Korea):** Kim founded Youth 4 Climate Action and won the first successful youth-led climate litigation in Asia. In August 2024, South Korea's Constitutional Court ruled that the government's climate policy violated the constitutional rights of future generations, mandating legally binding emissions reduction targets from 2031 to 2049. If implemented, the ruling could prevent over 1,500 million tonnes of carbon emissions over 25 years.

- **Europe — Sarah Finch (United Kingdom):** Finch and the Weald Action Group campaigned against oil drilling in southeastern England for over a decade. Their efforts resulted in the landmark "Finch ruling" from the UK Supreme Court in June 2024,
- **Islands and Island Nations — Theonila Roka Matbob (Papua New Guinea):** Roka Matbob led a campaign that compelled Rio Tinto, the world's second-largest mining company, to sign a memorandum of understanding in November 2024, acknowledging the environmental and social devastation caused by its Panguna copper mine — 35 years after the mine was shut following a local uprising — and committing to a remediation process.

IMPORTANT DAYS

Earth Day 2026: Date, Theme, Significance & Quotes

In the News: The world observed Earth Day under the theme "Our Power, Our Planet," uniting over a billion people across more than 190 countries in a global call for environmental action, renewable energy transition, and collective responsibility toward the planet.

Key Points:

- **Earth Day 2026 Theme:** The theme for this year is "Our Power, Our Planet," emphasizing that individual and community-level action can drive large-scale environmental change, accelerate the shift to renewable energy, and build accountability for environmental damage.
- **Date and Global Observance:** Earth Day is observed every year on April 22. In 2026, it is coordinated by EARTHDAY.ORG and marks participation from over 190 countries, making it the largest civic observance in the world, with over a billion people taking part.
- **Historical Origins:** Earth Day was first celebrated on April 22, 1970, initiated by U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson after witnessing the devastating 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill. Around 20 million Americans participated in the first Earth Day through rallies, teach-ins, and protests.
- **Legislative Impact:** The 1970 Earth Day movement directly led to the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and landmark legislation including the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, marking a watershed moment in environmental policy.
- **Global Expansion:** By 1990, Earth Day had expanded into a global event, mobilising around 200 million people across more than 140 countries. It has since grown into the world's largest environmental movement.
- **Key Environmental Issues Highlighted:** Earth Day 2026 draws attention to urgent challenges including climate change, deforestation, air and water pollution, and biodiversity loss, all of which continue to threaten ecosystems and human life globally.
- **How to Participate:** Activities worldwide include tree-planting drives, clean-up campaigns under the Great Global Cleanup initiative, climate marches, educational seminars, and digital activism through webinars, social media campaigns, and online pledges.

World Book Day 2026: Importance, History, and UNESCO Initiative

In the News: The world observed World Book and Copyright Day, an annual UNESCO initiative celebrating books, authors, and reading culture globally. This year, Rabat, the capital of Morocco, holds the title of World Book Capital 2026, with multilingualism as the central theme.

Key Points:

- **Date and Significance:** World Book and Copyright Day is observed every year on April 23. The date marks the death anniversaries of literary giants Miguel de Cervantes, William Shakespeare, and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, all recorded on April 23, 1616, making it symbolically significant for world literature.

- **Historical Origin:** The idea originated in Spain in the 1920s as a tribute to Cervantes, inspired by the Catalan tradition of exchanging books and roses. UNESCO formally declared April 23 as World Book and Copyright Day in 1995, with the aim of promoting reading, publishing, and protection of intellectual property worldwide.
- **World Book Capital 2026:** UNESCO designates a new city each year as the World Book Capital. In 2026, Rabat, Morocco holds this title. Key initiatives under this designation include expanding access to books, supporting the publishing industry, promoting literacy across all age groups, and highlighting North African and Arabic literature.
- **Theme for 2026:** The UNESCO theme for 2026 is multilingualism. The focus is on ensuring the availability of books in diverse languages, developing inclusive learning resources, and promoting cultural diversity through literature so that knowledge reaches people of all linguistic backgrounds.
- **Copyright Awareness:** The day also raises awareness about copyright laws that protect the rights of authors and creators, ensuring they receive proper recognition and rewards for their work.

National Panchayat Raj Day 2026: Theme, History, Significance & Celebrations

In the News: India observed National Panchayati Raj Day (NPRD), marking 33 years since the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across the country. The national event was held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, under the theme 'Sashakt Panchayat, Sarvangeen Vikas'.

Key Points:

- **National Event:** The Ministry of Panchayati Raj organized the central celebration at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi. The event was graced by Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj Prof. S. P. Singh Baghel, along with Secretary Shri Vivek Bharadwaj and other senior officials. Elected representatives of PRIs from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Haryana also participated.
- **Theme:** This year's theme, 'Sashakt Panchayat, Sarvangeen Vikas' (Empowered Panchayat, Holistic Development), focuses on strengthening local bodies to ensure inclusive and balanced development, with Panchayats playing a key role in implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the grassroots level.
- **Publications Released:** The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI)-2.0 Report was released at the event. Under the 'Panchayat Dharohar Initiative', three illustrated publications on rural heritage were also launched — a Monograph on Rural Heritage of Tripura, a Monograph on Rural Heritage of Tirupati, and 'Uttarkashi: Saumya Kashi: The Soul of Himalayan Heritage'.
- **Historical Background:** The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, came into force in 1993 and institutionalized a three-tier Panchayati Raj structure — Gram Panchayat (village level), Panchayat Samiti (block/intermediate level), and Zilla Parishad (district level). National Panchayati Raj Day has been officially observed since 2010.
- **Scale of the System:** India currently has approximately 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, over 6,600 Panchayat Samitis, and nearly 666 Zilla Parishads, collectively forming one of the world's largest decentralized governance networks.
- **Inclusion Mandate:** Out of the Reserved Seats, 1/3rd have to be reserved for the women of the ensures proportional representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), making local governance more participatory and representative.

ECONOMY

Depreciation of the Indian Rupee

In the News: The Indian rupee has been experiencing significant depreciation against the US dollar, hitting historic lows and crossing the 90-mark, making it one of the worst-performing major currencies in recent times. A BofA Securities report has analysed the multifaceted economic impact of this weakness, while a Bank of Baroda study has identified the key drivers behind the rupee's slide.

Key Points:

- **Scale of Depreciation:** The rupee depreciated by 4.7% year-to-date in 2025 and over 5.8% in the preceding one year in nominal terms. In Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER) terms, the weakness has been even sharper, with year-to-date depreciation estimated at 8.6% and one-year depreciation at 12.1% — comparable to major historical episodes such as the 8.7% fall in 2018, 14% in 2013, and 18.7% in 2008.
- **Role of Trade and Capital Flows:** India's persistent trade deficit raises demand for US dollars, exerting downward pressure on the rupee. Additionally, high US tariffs on Indian goods have reduced export competitiveness, while uncertainty surrounding the India-US trade deal has dampened investor confidence. Weak capital inflows across FDI, FPI, and debt-related categories have compounded the pressure, prompting the RBI to sell approximately \$65 billion in the open market between October 2024 and September 2025.
- **Channel 1 — Sentiment Impact:** Historical data suggests that rupee weakness exceeding 10% can negatively affect consumer confidence, business sentiment, and policy uncertainty indicators such as the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI). BofA warns that the current scale of depreciation could feed through to both consumer and business sentiment.
- **Channel 2 — Impact on GDP:** A weaker rupee influences GDP primarily through trade. A 5% decline in REER can reduce imports by approximately 2.3%, which boosts GDP through lower import volumes. On the export side, a 5% REER depreciation can increase exports by around 2%, with the current episode potentially yielding a ~4% improvement. An RBI study also concluded that rupee depreciation progressively enhances the trade balance, with potential savings of \$7–12 billion under the current depreciation scenario.
- **Channel 3 — Inflation Risk:** A weaker rupee can import inflation through three sub-channels — energy costs, precious metals prices, and intermediate/consumer goods. However, BofA notes that the sharp fall in crude oil prices (to \$60–65 per barrel, approximately \$15 lower than the previous year's average) has limited the energy inflation risk. Deflationary trends from China have also suppressed WPI inflation. RBI models suggest a 5% REER depreciation can raise inflation by around 35 basis points over 3–4 quarters, implying a 60–70 basis points upward risk in the current episode — though a full inflation spiral is considered unlikely given the global commodity price backdrop.
- **Channel 4 — External Sector:** Over the medium term, rupee depreciation is expected to improve India's current account deficit. Imports become costlier, compressing demand, while exports become more competitive. Services exports are projected to improve by 0.8% for every 1% currency weakness. Remittance inflows also tend to rise after a period of depreciation stabilises. However, BofA cautions that US tariff-related headwinds may delay the typical "J-Curve" effect on goods trade by 2–4 quarters.
- **Channel 5 — Fiscal Implications:** On the fiscal side, a weaker rupee is likely to modestly increase fertiliser subsidies while LPG subsidy impact remains limited. On the positive side, RBI's large-scale forex market interventions are expected to generate higher foreign exchange earnings, potentially resulting in increased RBI dividend transfers to the government in FY2026–27.

APPOINTMENTS

NASSCOM Gets New Chairman: AI Expert Srikanth Velamakanni Takes Charge

In the News: Srikanth Velamakanni, Co-founder and Group CEO of Fractal Analytics, was appointed as the new Chairman of NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) in April 2026, succeeding Sindhu Gangadharan, Managing Director of SAP Labs India, who completed her term as Chairperson.

Key Points:

- **New Chairman:** Srikanth Velamakanni has been appointed Chairperson of NASSCOM. He assumes the role after previously serving as Vice Chairperson and as an Executive Council member of NASSCOM for over six years.
- **New Vice Chairperson:** Kishor Patil, CEO and Managing Director of KPIT, has been elected as the new Vice Chairperson of NASSCOM alongside Velamakanni's elevation.

- **Who is Srikanth Velamakanni:** He is the Co-founder and Group CEO of Fractal Analytics, one of India's earliest and most prominent AI-first enterprises. He brings over two decades of experience in data science, artificial intelligence (AI), analytics, enterprise AI, responsible technology, and global go-to-market strategy.
- **About NASSCOM:** NASSCOM is the apex body representing India's IT and Business Process Management (BPM) industry. It promotes growth of digital services, supports policy advocacy, encourages innovation in AI and cloud computing, and represents India's IT sector on the global stage.
- **Strategic Priorities:** Velamakanni will work closely with NASSCOM President Rajesh Nambiar and the Executive Council. Key focus areas include accelerating services transformation with AI, catalyzing product innovation, and positioning India as a global leader in Agentic AI, multi-agent systems, and vertical AI products.

STATIC

Resolution 47 on Kashmir: When India ran into 'power politics' at the UN

In the News: The United Nations Resolution 47 on the Jammu and Kashmir conflict completed 78 years since its adoption on April 21, 1948. The resolution, passed amid the first India-Pakistan war over Kashmir, called for a plebiscite to decide the region's accession — a vote that was never held. The BJP criticized Nehru's decision to approach the UN, calling it a move that prolonged the Kashmir issue for nearly seven decades.

Key Points:

- **Background — Partition and Accession:** Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir initially chose independence after Partition in 1947. In October 1947, tribal raiders backed by Pakistan invaded the region, forcing Hari Singh to seek Indian military help. India's assistance came only after Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession, formally joining the Indian Union.
- **Why India Went to the UN:** India approached the UN Security Council with a narrow request — to ask Pakistan to withdraw its personnel and stop supporting the invaders. Both Mountbatten and British PM Attlee advised India against military escalation into Pakistan, pushing New Delhi toward the diplomatic route instead.
- **Pakistan's Counter-Framing:** At the UN, Pakistan broadened the Kashmir issue into the larger Partition dispute, alleging mistreatment of Muslims in India and portraying the tribal raiders as volunteers helping "suffering" Muslim brethren. This framing gained traction at the Security Council.
- **Role of Power Politics:** The US and Britain sided with Pakistan, partly because Pakistan was seen as a more useful Cold War ally against the Soviet Union. Britain also feared alienating the Muslim world amid the ongoing Palestine crisis. India's agenda item was even changed from the "Jammu and Kashmir question" to the "India-Pakistan question" — a symbolic but significant diplomatic setback.
- **What Resolution 47 Said:** Adopted on April 21, 1948, the resolution called for a ceasefire, withdrawal of non-resident fighters, phased reduction of Indian forces, and a free and impartial plebiscite to decide whether J&K would accede to India or Pakistan.
- **Later Developments:** Article 370 was incorporated into the Indian Constitution on October 17, 1949, granting J&K special status. On August 5, 2019, the Central Government revoked Article 370, fundamentally changing J&K's constitutional relationship with India.

SPORTS

Abhishek Sharma First Indian To Do So In IPL History

In the News: Sunrisers Hyderabad opener Abhishek Sharma smashed an unbeaten 135 off 68 balls against Delhi Capitals in the IPL 2026, becoming the first Indian batter to score multiple IPL centuries in under 50 balls, as SRH won by 47 runs.

Key Points:

- **Historic Milestone:** Abhishek Sharma became the first Indian cricketer to score multiple IPL centuries in under 50 balls, having previously hit a 40-ball century in IPL 2025 and now following it up with a 47-ball century in IPL 2026 against Delhi Capitals.
- **Record-Breaking Knock:** His unbeaten 135 off 68 balls is the fifth-highest individual score in IPL history, bettered only by Chris Gayle (175*), Brendon McCullum (158*), his own 141 on the same ground in IPL 2025, and Quinton de Kock's 140 in 2022.
- **Innings Highlights:** Abhishek hit 10 fours and 10 sixes, maintained a strike rate above 200, reached his century in just 47 deliveries, and recorded both the fastest century and the highest individual score against Delhi Capitals in IPL history.
- **Match Result:** Sunrisers Hyderabad posted 242-2 in 20 overs. Delhi Capitals could manage only 195-9 in reply, with Eshan Malinga taking 4-32. SRH won by 47 runs, their third consecutive victory, moving to third place in the IPL 2026 standings, three points behind leaders Punjab Kings.
- **Elite T20 Status:** The knock was Abhishek's ninth T20 century overall, placing him joint fourth on the all-time T20 centuries list. He is currently ranked number one in the men's T20 batting rankings.
- **10+ Sixes Club:** With 10 sixes in this innings, Abhishek has now hit 10 or more sixes in 5 T20 innings, second only to Chris Gayle who has achieved the feat in 18 T20 innings.
- **Indian Batters with IPL Centuries Under 50 Balls:** Abhishek Sharma leads the list with 2 such centuries (40 balls, 47 balls), ahead of Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (35 balls), Yusuf Pathan (37 balls), Priyansh Arya (39 balls), and several others including Virat Kohli (47 balls) and Virender Sehwag (48 balls).

Athletics Integrity Unit Puts India in Category A: Rising Doping Cases Raise Alarm

In the News: The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) has upgraded India to Category A, classifying it as a high-risk nation for doping violations. The decision follows India's consistent ranking among the top countries for Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs) from 2022 to 2025, with India ranking first in both 2024 and 2025.

Key Points:

- **Category A Classification:** The AIU has placed India in Category A, its highest-risk category for doping violations. This classification is not merely symbolic and brings with it mandatory extensive annual testing programs, increased monitoring of national team athletes, tougher compliance with international anti-doping standards, and greater global oversight and scrutiny.
- **Rising ADRV Data:** India's doping violations have shown a consistent upward trend. India recorded 48 ADRVs in 2022 (ranked 2nd), 63 in 2023 (ranked 2nd), 71 in 2024 (ranked 1st), and 30 ADRVs so far in 2025 (ranked 1st), making it one of the most affected countries globally.
- **AIU's Concern:** AIU Chair David Howman stated that India's anti-doping framework has not kept pace with the scale of the problem. He pointed to the high prevalence of doping over many years, the absence of effective and proportionate testing systems, and the need for stronger enforcement and education programs as key gaps driving the classification.
- **Impact on Indian Athletes:** Athletes representing India in major international events such as the Olympics and World Championships will now be subjected to rigorous testing protocols as a direct consequence of the Category A status.
- **AFI's Response:** The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) has accepted the AIU's decision and committed to corrective action. Planned measures include strengthening anti-doping education programs, enhancing testing mechanisms, and supporting intelligence-based investigations.
- **Call for Stricter Penalties:** AFI spokesperson Adille Sumariwalla has advocated for the criminalization of doping, with a specific focus on targeting suppliers and facilitators of banned substances, and has proposed strict penalties for coaches and support staff found complicit in doping violations.

Virat Kohli Becomes First Player in IPL History to Hit 800 Boundaries

In the News: During Royal Challengers Bengaluru's clash against Gujarat Titans in IPL 2026, Virat Kohli became the first player in IPL history to smash 800 fours — reaching the landmark by driving Kagiso Rabada to the long-on boundary. The milestone adds yet another record to Kohli's extraordinary IPL legacy, all achieved in RCB colours since his debut in 2008.

Key Points:

- **Historic 800 Fours Milestone:** Virat Kohli became the first batter in IPL history to hit 800 fours, achieving the feat against Gujarat Titans in IPL 2026. He was sitting on 799 boundaries and had also been dropped on zero in the opening over by Mohammed Siraj before reaching the landmark in style.
- **Kohli's Overall IPL Record:** Since making his IPL debut in 2008, Kohli has played 274 matches for RCB, scoring 8,924 runs at an average of 39.79, including 65 fifties and eight centuries, alongside his record 801 fours and 299 sixes — all for a single franchise.
- **Closest Competitors in the Fours Tally:** Shikhar Dhawan (768 fours in 222 matches across DC, DCH, MI, PBKS, and SRH) is second, followed by David Warner (663 fours in 184 matches for DC and SRH), Rohit Sharma (653 fours in 276 matches for DCH and MI), and Ajinkya Rahane (522 fours in 205 matches across multiple franchises).
- **Top 10 — Most Boundaries (Fours) in IPL History:**

Player	Matches	Runs	4s	6s
Virat Kohli (RCB)	274	8,924	801	299
Shikhar Dhawan (DC/DCH/MI/PBKS/SRH)	222	6,769	768	152
David Warner (DC/SRH)	184	6,565	663	236
Rohit Sharma (DCH/MI)	276	7,183	653	310
Ajinkya Rahane (CSK/DC/KKR/MI/RPS/RR)	205	5,184	522	132
Suresh Raina (CSK/GL)	205	5,528	506	203
Gautam Gambhir (DC/KKR)	154	4,217	492	59
Robin Uthappa (CSK/KKR/MI/PWI/RCB/RR)	205	4,952	481	182
KL Rahul (DC/KXIP/LSG/PBKS/RCB/SRH)	151	5,427	472	218
Suryakumar Yadav (KKR/MI)	173	4,468	471	172