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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

Adampur Airport Renamed Sri Guru Ravidas Maharaj Ji Airport

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Punjab to mark the 649th Birth Anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas Ji. During the visit, PM Modi unveiled the new name of Adampur Airport in Jalandhar as 'Shri Guru Ravidass Maharaj Ji Airport, Adampur' honoring the revered saint and social reformer whose teachings of equality, compassion, and human dignity continue to inspire India's social ethos. It actually resumed on March 31, 2024.

Key Points:

- **Airport Renaming Significance:** Adampur Airport in Jalandhar has been renamed Sri Guru Ravidas Maharaj Ji Airport, fulfilling a long-pending demand raised by multiple political parties and social groups in Punjab. A resolution seeking this renaming was passed by the Punjab Vidhan Sabha in 2020 and reiterated by the current state government, carrying strong social and cultural significance for communities that deeply revere Guru Ravidas.
- **About Sant Guru Ravidas Ji:** Guru Ravidas was a prominent social reformer and Bhakti movement saint whose 649th Birth Anniversary was commemorated on this occasion. His teachings emphasized equality, compassion, and human dignity, making him a revered figure particularly in Punjab's Doaba region and among communities that follow his philosophy.
- **Adampur Airport Infrastructure:** Revamped at a cost of ₹125 crore under the UDAN 5.0 scheme, the airport serves Punjab's Doaba region. Spread over 40 acres, the civil terminal operates using the Adampur Air Force Station airstrip. It resumed operations on March 31, 2024, after a four-year suspension due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Halwara Airport Terminal Inauguration:** PM Modi inaugurated the newly constructed civil terminal at Halwara Airport in Ludhiana district, built at a cost of ₹54 crore. The terminal has been developed by expanding the Halwara Air Force base and has the capacity to handle 300 passengers at a time, significantly improving civil aviation facilities in the industrial hub of Ludhiana.
- **UDAN Scheme Integration:** Both airport developments are part of the UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) scheme, which aims to make air travel affordable and accessible to common citizens while strengthening regional connectivity and boosting aviation growth in underserved areas of Punjab.

16th Finance Commission Keeps the 41% Share Devolution

In the News: While presenting the Union Budget 2026-27 in Parliament, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that the Government has accepted the recommendation of the 16th Finance Commission to retain the vertical share of devolution at 41 percent.

Key Points:

- **41% Vertical Devolution Retained:** Despite demands from 18 states to raise their share to 50%, the Commission retained the 41% devolution rate (states' share in the divisible pool of Central taxes).
- **Finance Commission Grants for FY 2026-27:** The Government has provided ₹1.4 lakh crore to states for FY 2026-27 as Finance Commission Grants. These include Rural and Urban Local Body Grants and Disaster Management Grants, emphasizing purpose-linked functional support rather than general fiscal transfers.
- **Introduction of GDP Contribution Criterion:** A major innovation is the introduction of State GDP contribution as a new parameter in the horizontal devolution formula, carrying a 10% weight. This criterion recognizes and rewards states that contribute more to national economic growth, representing a directional change to balance efficiency with equity.
- **Elimination of Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs):** For the first time, the Commission recommended zero Revenue Deficit Grants, arguing that RDGs weaken incentives for fiscal reform by encouraging dependency. The Commission stated that states have sufficient scope to increase revenues and rationalize expenditure, marking a major departure from earlier Finance Commissions and pushing towards self-reliance and fiscal responsibility.
- **Local Bodies Funding:** The Commission earmarked ₹7.91 trillion for rural and urban local bodies over five years, with a 60:40 rural-urban split. The funding focuses on water, sanitation, and urban infrastructure development, emphasizing grassroots-level governance and service delivery.

- **Constitutional Mandate:** As mandated under Article 281 of the Constitution, the Government will lay the Commission's report along with an explanatory memorandum on the action taken on its recommendations in Parliament. This ensures transparency and accountability in implementing Finance Commission recommendations.

Meet The First Woman To Hold AAI Board Member Post

In the News: Nivedita Dubey assumed charge as Member (Human Resources) of the Airports Authority of India (AAI), becoming the first woman to hold a Board-level position in the organization's history. A seasoned aviation professional with over three decades of experience, her appointment marks a historic milestone for AAI and represents a significant step towards inclusive leadership in India's civil aviation sector.

Key Points:

- **Historic Appointment:** Nivedita Dubey became the first woman Director (HR) and first woman officer to be inducted into the AAI Board. She assumed charge on January 30, 2026, marking a watershed moment for gender representation in India's aviation leadership.
- **Position and Role:** As Member (Human Resources), Dubey will oversee critical functions including personnel policies, industrial relations, staff welfare, training and development, and commercial management. She plays a central role in strengthening the workforce that supports India's rapidly expanding aviation infrastructure.
- **Personal Background:** Nivedita Dubey is a native of Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), Uttar Pradesh. She completed her early education at St. Mary's Convent School in Prayagraj, bringing pride to the Sangam city with her historic achievement.
- **Key Operational Experience:** Her performance as Airport Manager at Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGI Airport), New Delhi, was widely appreciated. She handled critical emergency situations, managed large teams, and addressed complex operational challenges at one of India's busiest airports.
- **Regional Leadership Milestone:** In 2023, Dubey became the first woman Regional Executive Director (Eastern Region) of AAI, managing 12 airports across the region. This position marked another significant breakthrough in her career and for women's representation in senior aviation management.

Yantra India Limited Granted Miniratna Category-I Status by Ministry of Defense

In the News: Defense Minister Rajnath Singh approved Miniratna Category-I status for Yantra India Limited (YIL), a defense Public Sector Undertaking formed after the corporatization of the Ordnance Factory Board in October 2021.

Key Points:

- **Ministerial Approval:** Defense Minister Rajnath Singh approved the grant of Miniratna Category-I status to Yantra India Limited on February 2, 2026. The Minister congratulated YIL for successfully transforming from a government organization into a profit-making corporate entity within approximately four years of its inception.
- **About Yantra India Limited:** YIL is one of seven Defense Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) formed after the corporatization of the Ordnance Factory Board on October 1, 2021. It operates as a Schedule 'A' DPSU under the administrative control of the Department of Defense Production, Ministry of Defence. The company is headquartered at Ordnance Factory Ambajhari, Nagpur, Maharashtra.
- **Product Portfolio:** YIL manufactures critical defense products including carbon fiber composites, glass composites, aluminum alloys, forgings, castings, metal and steel components, assembly products for medium and large caliber ammunition, armored vehicles, artillery guns, main battle tanks, and defense-grade industrial materials.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** To qualify for Miniratna Category-I status, a CPSE must have positive net worth, be profitable for the last three years, demonstrate strong management capabilities, and play an important role in its sector. The company must meet specific financial parameters and operational benchmarks.
- **Miniratna Category-II Distinction:** Miniratna has two sub-categories: Category-I (₹500 crore capital expenditure autonomy or net worth) and Category-II (₹300 crore or 50% of net worth). YIL received the higher Category-I status, reflecting its stronger financial performance and operational scale.

Supreme Court Orders Tribunal on Pennaiyar Water Dispute

In the News: The Supreme Court of India directed the Union government to constitute a tribunal within one month to adjudicate the long-pending inter-state water dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over the Pennaiyar River. The order marks a significant step towards resolving a conflict that has remained unresolved for several years despite repeated representations and failed negotiation attempts between the two states.

Key Points:

- **Supreme Court Directive:** A two-judge bench comprising Justices Vikram Nath and N V Anjaria directed the Centre to issue a notification in the official gazette and constitute an inter-state water disputes tribunal. The court observed that there was no justification for further delay in initiating the statutory mechanism to resolve the dispute.
- **Case Background:** The case stems from an original suit (Original Suit No. 1 of 2018) filed by the Tamil Nadu government under Article 131 of the Constitution against Karnataka and the Union government. Tamil Nadu challenged Karnataka's construction of check dams and diversion structures on the Pennaiyar River and sought the constitution of a river water tribunal.
- **Court's Final Order:** The Supreme Court returned the complaint in Original Suit No. 1 of 2018 for presentation and adjudication before the tribunal to be constituted. The court wrapped up hearings on December 19, 2025, after the Centre submitted that no consensus could be arrived at and discussions for an amicable settlement had failed between the states.
- **Tamil Nadu's Contentions:** Tamil Nadu contended that Karnataka's upstream interventions through check dams and diversion structures adversely affect water availability in its downstream regions, particularly during lean seasons. These interventions impact agriculture and drinking water supply in Tamil Nadu's portions of the Pennaiyar basin, affecting the interests of downstream inhabitants.
- **Constitutional Arguments:** Tamil Nadu argued that water in an inter-state river is a national asset governed by constitutional provisions and that no single state can claim exclusive ownership or unilateral control. The state maintained that Karnataka's actions violated established principles governing inter-state rivers and warranted adjudication under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 (Central Act 33 of 1956).
- **Pennaiyar River Geography:** The Pennaiyar is an inter-state river with Karnataka being the upper riparian state and Tamil Nadu the lower riparian state. This geographical positioning is central to the dispute, as upstream activities by Karnataka directly affect downstream water availability in Tamil Nadu.
- **Markandeya River Projects:** In addition to the Pennaiyar dispute, Tamil Nadu also challenged projects on the Markandeya River. The state specifically sought directions to maintain status quo regarding construction of a dam across the Markandeya River near Yargol Village in Karnataka pending tribunal constitution.
- **Specific Water Diversion Issues:** Tamil Nadu sought status quo on several specific water diversion activities including pumping of water from Varathur tank to Narsapur tank in Kolar district, pumping from Yellamallappa Chetty tank to Hoskote tank, and direct pumping from the Pennaiyar River at Belahalli and Thattanur villages in Karnataka.

Manipur Set for New Govt, as Ruling Party Elects This Leader For CM Post

In the News: The BJP elected **Yumnam Khemchand Singh** as the leader of its legislature party in Manipur, paving the way for him to become the next Chief Minister. President's Rule, imposed in February 2025 following prolonged ethnic violence and political instability, was revoked on the same day. Singh staked his claim to form a BJP-led NDA government and is set to be sworn in at 6 PM at Lok Bhavan, Imphal, just days before President's Rule was scheduled to end on February 13, 2026.

Key Points:

- **New CM-Designate:** Yumnam Khemchand Singh, a 62-year-old senior BJP leader and two-time MLA from Singjamei constituency, was elected as the leader of the BJP legislature party. He is known as a disciplined party organizer, former taekwondo sportsperson, and has served as Speaker of the Manipur Assembly and cabinet minister.
- **President's Rule Revoked:** President's Rule, which was imposed in Manipur in February 2025, was officially revoked on February 4, 2026. The rule was extended for six months by Parliament on August 5, 2025, and was set to end on February 13, 2026.

- **Government Formation:** Singh met Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at Lok Bhavan, Imphal, and submitted his claim to form a BJP-led NDA government. The swearing-in ceremony was scheduled for 6 PM on the same day. Two Kuki-Zo MLAs, L.M. Khaute and Ngursanglur Sanate, were present during the claim submission.
- **Assembly Composition:** The 60-member Manipur Assembly has 37 BJP MLAs (including seven Kuki-Zo legislators), six National People's Party (NPP) MLAs, five Naga People's Front MLAs and five JD(U) MLAs joined from an original 32. The new government is expected to include broader representation from conflict-affected communities.
- **Background of Crisis:** The political crisis began in May 2023 when ethnic violence erupted between Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, leading to large-scale displacement, geographical division between Valley and Hills, and erosion of public confidence in governance.

Amit Shah Launches Bharat Taxi, India's First Cooperative-Based Ride-Hailing Platform

In the News: Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah officially launched Bharat Taxi on February 5, 2026, India's first cooperative-based ride-hailing platform, at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, though the pilot began in December 2025 and official launch was February 2026. Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sahkar se Samriddhi' (prosperity through cooperation), this launch marks a significant milestone in strengthening the cooperative sector and promoting inclusive, citizen-centric mobility solutions in India.

Key Points:

- **Platform Registration and Establishment:** Bharat Taxi is India's first cooperative-led ride-hailing platform registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002, and was formally established on June 6, 2025. It has emerged as the world's first and largest cooperative-based ride-hailing platform and the world's largest driver-owned mobility platform.
- **Zero-Commission Model:** The platform operates on a zero-commission and surge-free pricing model with direct distribution of profits to drivers. Unlike conventional platforms where drivers pay 20-25% commission per ride, Bharat Taxi ensures drivers receive the full fare, presenting an indigenous alternative to foreign investment-based aggregator platforms.
- **'Sarathi Hi Malik' Principle:** Drivers, referred to as Sarathis (not just drivers), are placed at the centre of ownership, operations, and value creation. This core principle means "the driver is the owner," making them true stakeholders in the platform and freeing them from exploitative aggregator-based models.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Nine Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were exchanged with key public and private stakeholders to strengthen operational integration, digital empowerment, safety, and service delivery, ensuring enhanced platform efficiency and user experience.
- **Social Security Benefits:** Bharat Taxi prioritises comprehensive social security for Sarathis through health insurance, accident insurance, retirement savings, and a dedicated driver support system. Support centres are currently operational at seven key locations in Delhi, providing rapid emergency assistance, verified ride data, and grievance redressal.
- **Women Empowerment Initiative:** To promote gender inclusion and women's safety, the "Bike Didi" (also referred to as "Sarathi Didi") initiative has been implemented, under which more than 150 women drivers have joined Bharat Taxi so far, marking a strong step towards women's empowerment in the mobility sector.

Centre, Nagaland & ENPO Just Made a Historic Pact – But What Is FNTA?

In the News: Central Government, the Nagaland Government, and the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) signed a historic tripartite agreement in New Delhi to establish the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA). The agreement was signed in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio. This unique administrative arrangement aims to address long-standing demands for autonomy in eastern Nagaland while maintaining the state's territorial integrity and constitutional protections.

Key Points:

- **What Is FNTA:** The Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority is an autonomous administrative body within Nagaland, designed to provide greater local governance and decision-making powers to six eastern districts. It is a unique model that balances regional aspirations with national unity, offering an alternative to the demand for a separate state.

- **Districts Covered:** FNTA will govern six eastern districts of Nagaland – Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak, and Shamator. These districts share strategic borders with Myanmar and have historically faced underdevelopment and neglect.
- **About ENPO:** The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation is an apex body representing eight recognized Naga tribes from the six eastern districts. ENPO had been demanding a separate state since 2010, citing decades of developmental neglect and lack of political attention.
- **Powers Devolved:** Under the agreement, 46 subjects will be transferred to FNTA, enabling greater local decision-making, faster administrative approvals, and focused infrastructure planning. A mini-secretariat headed by an Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary will be established for effective governance.
- **Financial Autonomy:** The agreement provides for enhanced financial powers for FNTA, with development funding allocated proportional to population and area. The Ministry of Home Affairs will support initial establishment costs, ensuring economic empowerment and optimal resource utilization.
- **Article 371(A) Protection:** A crucial assurance is that the FNTA agreement does not affect Article 371(A) of the Constitution in any manner. Article 371(A) provides special protections to Nagaland regarding customary laws, land ownership, religious and social practices, ensuring these constitutional safeguards remain intact.

Andhra Pradesh Set to Launch Amaravati Quantum Valley Project

In the News: Union Minister for Science & Technology Dr. Jitendra Singh and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu laid the foundation stone for the Amaravati Quantum Valley project in Amaravati, positioning it as India's first dedicated "Quantum Valley" and linking it to the National Quantum Mission (NQM) for quantum research, innovation, and ecosystem building.

Key Points:

- **Foundation stone and positioning:** The announcement envisages Amaravati as a major hub for quantum research and innovation under mission-mode national initiatives, with a focus on building an industry-academia-government ecosystem for quantum technologies.
- **National Quantum Mission linkage:** The Amaravati initiative is positioned as a State-level springboard aligned to the National Quantum Mission, which aims to accelerate India's capability in quantum computing, communication, sensing, and materials.
- **Mission scale and outlay:** India's National Quantum Mission is backed by an allocation of about ₹6,000 crore, implemented across 43 institutions in 17 States and 2 Union Territories through a "whole-of-government, whole-of-nation" approach.
- **Core national targets:** Key national objectives include developing quantum computers with up to 1,000 physical qubits within eight years and enabling inter-city quantum key distribution (QKD) over about 2,000 kilometres, alongside secure quantum communication networks.
- **Four thematic hubs under NQM:** The Mission is organised through four thematic hubs focusing on Quantum Computing, Quantum Communication, Quantum Sensing and Metrology, and Quantum Materials and Devices.
- **Ecosystem elements announced at Amaravati:** The Amaravati programme includes the creation of an 'Amaravati Quantum Centre' and ecosystem-building elements such as quantum cloud services, an innovation centre, a talent hub, and multiple industry collaboration MoUs to seed research, skilling, and applied pilots.
- **Why quantum matters for national security and economy:** Quantum technologies are framed as strategically important for securing communications, strengthening defence and cybersecurity architectures, enabling advanced sensing, and unlocking high-value innovation for industry and startups.

SC Gives Telangana Speaker a Final Three-Week Deadline on Pending Disqualification Petitions

In the News: In a case arising from the defection of several Telangana MLAs, the Supreme Court directed the Telangana Legislative Assembly Speaker to decide the pending disqualification petitions within a final three-week period, and warned that non-compliance could invite contempt proceedings.

Key Points:

- **Constitutional basis:** The Anti-Defection Law is contained in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, inserted by the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985, to curb political defections that destabilise elected governments.
- **Grounds for disqualification:** A legislator can be disqualified if they voluntarily give up membership of their political party, or if they vote/abstain contrary to a party whip (without prior permission), subject to prescribed exceptions.
- **Independent members and nominated members:** Independent members who join any political party after election and nominated members who join a party after the permitted window can also attract disqualification under the Tenth Schedule framework.
- **Adjudicating authority:** Disqualification petitions are decided by the Speaker/Chairman of the House, and questions frequently arise regarding neutrality, delays, and the political impact of pending decisions.
- **Judicial review:** The Supreme Court has held that the Speaker's decision is subject to judicial review, but courts generally avoid interfering at an interlocutory stage unless exceptional circumstances arise.
- **Delay as a governance problem:** Although the Constitution does not prescribe a strict time limit, prolonged pendency of disqualification petitions can alter legislative majorities, affect confidence votes, and undermine the objective of curbing defections.
- **Reform debates:** Reform proposals include prescribing a statutory/constitutional time-limit for decisions, shifting adjudication from the Speaker to an independent tribunal, and tightening the treatment of splits/mergers to reduce tactical defections.
- **Telangana-specific context (current case):** The matter relates to disqualification petitions against defecting Telangana MLAs; the Supreme Court's direction to decide within three weeks, backed by a contempt warning, signals a stronger judicial push against indefinite Speaker delays.

INTERNATIONAL

Dalai Lama's First Grammy at 90 More Than a Musical Milestone

In the News: At the 68th Grammy Awards in Los Angeles in 2026, the Dalai Lama made history by winning his first-ever Grammy Award at the age of 90. The Tibetan spiritual leader was honored in the Best Audio Book, Narration & Storytelling Recording category for his spoken-word album "Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama."

Key Points:

- **Historic Grammy Win:** The Dalai Lama, also known as Tenzin Gyatso, won his first Grammy at age 90 in the Best Audio Book, Narration & Storytelling Recording category. This victory is historic because spiritual leaders rarely receive recognition at entertainment awards of this scale, representing a unique intersection of spirituality and mainstream popular culture.
- **About the Album 'Meditations':** The spoken-word album "Meditations: The Reflections of His Holiness the Dalai Lama" focuses on themes of compassion, peace, mindfulness, and the interconnectedness of humanity. The album blends the Dalai Lama's calm narration with musical compositions rooted in Hindustani classical traditions, featuring contributions from multiple artists.
- **Award Acceptance:** Musician Rufus Wainwright, who collaborated on the project, accepted the Grammy Award on the Dalai Lama's behalf. Wainwright described working on the album as a privilege, emphasizing its spiritual and artistic depth, and expressed honor at being part of the project.
- **Nobel Peace Prize Recognition:** Although this is his first Grammy, the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his lifelong commitment to nonviolent struggle for the liberation of Tibet and his efforts to promote peace and human values around the world. This remains one of his most notable early-career honors.
- **Other Prestigious Awards:** The Dalai Lama's lifetime of honors includes the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 2012, recognizing his contributions to spiritual understanding and human flourishing. He has also received the Liberty Medal and several other international awards reflecting his influence on global peace, ethics, and education.

- **Academic Honors:** The spiritual leader has received numerous academic honors including Doctor Honoris Causa (honorary doctorate) degrees from institutions around the world, including universities in the United States, Italy, and India. These reflect his significant influence on global education and interfaith dialogue beyond his religious role.

Grammy Awards 2026 Full Winners List: Who Ruled Music's Biggest Night?

In the News: The 68th Grammy Awards held in 2026 celebrated the best in global music, honoring chart-toppers, genre-defining albums, and breakout artists across diverse musical categories. The ceremony turned the global spotlight on musical excellence, creativity, and cultural impact, with big names like Kendrick Lamar, Lady Gaga, Bad Bunny, and Billie Eilish dominating the night.

Key Points:

- **Album of the Year:** Bad Bunny won Album of the Year for "Debí Tirar Más Fotos," defeating strong competitors including Justin Bieber (Swag), Sabrina Carpenter (Man's Best Friend), Lady Gaga (Mayhem), Kendrick Lamar (GNX), Leon Thomas (Mutt), and Tyler, the Creator (Chromakopia). This marked a significant win for Latin music on the global stage.
- **Record of the Year:** Kendrick Lamar featuring SZA won Record of the Year for "Luther," beating out Bad Bunny (DtMF), Sabrina Carpenter (Manchild), Billie Eilish (Wildflower), Lady Gaga (Abracadabra), and Rosé & Bruno Mars (APT.). This recognition highlighted the track's artistic impact and production excellence.
- **Song of the Year:** Billie Eilish won Song of the Year for "Wildflower," competing against Lady Gaga (Abracadabra), Kendrick Lamar with SZA (Luther), Bad Bunny (DtMF), Sabrina Carpenter (Manchild), and Rosé & Bruno Mars (APT.). This award recognizes songwriting excellence and lyrical composition.
- **Best New Artist:** Olivia Dean won the prestigious Best New Artist award, beating out competitors including Katseye, The Marias, Addison Rae, Sombr, Leon Thomas, Alex Warren, and Lola Young. This category traditionally launches careers and identifies emerging talent in the music industry.
- **Lady Gaga's Multiple Wins:** Lady Gaga had a dominant night, winning Best Pop Vocal Album for "Mayhem" (defeating Justin Bieber, Sabrina Carpenter, Miley Cyrus, and Teddy Swims) and Best Dance-Pop Recording for "Abracadabra" (beating Selena Gomez & Benny Blanco, Zara Larsson, Tate McRae, and PinkPantheress).
- **Country Music Winners:** Chris Stapleton won Best Country Solo Performance for "Bad As I Used to Be," while Jelly Roll won Best Contemporary Country Album for "Beautifully Broken." Zach Top won Best Traditional Country Album for "Ain't In It for My Health," and Tyler Childers won Best Country Song for "Bitin' List."
- **Pop Category Winners:** Lola Young won Best Pop Solo Performance for "Messy," defeating Justin Bieber, Sabrina Carpenter, Lady Gaga, and Chappell Roan. Cynthia Erivo & Ariana Grande won Best Pop Duo/Group Performance for "Defying Gravity."
- **Grammy Legacy:** For nearly seven decades, the Grammy Awards have honored musical excellence, previously recognizing icons like Beyoncé, Eminem, and Stevie Wonder. The 2026 ceremony reflected diversity in music styles, global participation, and evolving listener tastes, reinforcing the Grammys' role as a mirror of the international music landscape.
- **Special Performances and Tributes:** The ceremony featured political statements from host Trevor Noah, who took advantage of hosting the show for the last time. Lauryn Hill's return after 27 years to perform and pay tribute to D'Angelo marked one of the evening's most emotional moments.

India-US Trade Deal Reaffirms What Had Started Looking Hazy: India's Role as US Ally & China Counter

In the News: India and the United States announced a major trade deal featuring a steep cut in US tariffs to 18 percent from 50 percent, reinforcing what was always believed in New Delhi but had begun looking hazy—that the US sees in India an ally and counterweight to China as it seeks to rewrite the norms of the global trade order. The deal, negotiated under US President Donald Trump's administration, addresses several sticky issues and positions India favorably in the global trade landscape alongside recent agreements with the UK and European Union.

Key Points:

- **Tariff Reduction:** The headline US tariff for Indian goods has been reduced to 18 percent from 50 percent under the reciprocal trade deal (Trump had imposed 25% reciprocal + 25% punitive = 50% total), though initially it was 25%

before the additional punitive tariff. This places India in a reasonably competitive position against other economies in terms of accessing the American market, though the fine print of the deal will determine its true favorability given Trump's typically extractive negotiation strategy.

- **Strategic Alliance Confirmation:** The deal reaffirms India's role as a US ally and counterweight to China in the global trade order. This strategic positioning had started looking uncertain but has been reinforced through this agreement, demonstrating Washington's commitment to deepening economic ties with New Delhi as part of its broader China strategy.
- **Commitment to Purchase American Goods:** India has committed to stepping up purchases of American products, including an agreement to buy over \$500 billion worth of American energy products (natural gas and coal), technology products, and nuclear equipment. For context, India's total goods imports in FY25 stood at \$720.24 billion, making this a substantial commitment. The \$500 billion commitment covers multiple categories: energy, technology, agricultural products, coal, and other products.
- **China's Response and Warnings:** China has warned of consequences if trade agreements are struck at its expense. China's chokehold on rare earth elements has not only hurt American companies but also impacted Indian industries, particularly the automobile sector, highlighting strategic vulnerabilities that need to be addressed.
- **Prospects for China Thaw:** While positioning itself as a US ally and China counter, prospects of a thaw in direct trade relations between India and China are also unfolding, suggesting New Delhi is pursuing a balanced approach to manage complex geopolitical and economic relationships.

Dhaka Court Sentences Former PM Sheikh Hasina to 10 Years in Corruption Cases

In the News: A Dhaka special court sentenced former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to 10 years in prison in two corruption cases related to irregularities in the Purbachal New Town plot allocation project. The verdict also convicted several of her family members, including her niece Tulip Siddiq, a British MP, marking one of the most significant corruption judgments in Bangladesh's recent history. Hasina has been living in exile in India since August 2024 following her ouster from power.

Key Points:

- **Court Verdict:** Judge of Special Judge's Court-4 in Dhaka sentenced Sheikh Hasina to five years in each of two corruption cases, totaling 10 years in prison. The document states 5 years in each of two cases (totaling 10 years), plus 26 years from previous cases (November-December 2025), totaling 36 years. The court also imposed a fine of Tk 2 lakh. The document mentions "Tk 1 lakh per case" for two cases on Hasina, with failure to pay resulting in an additional six months' imprisonment.
- **Corruption Charges Details:** The cases relate to alleged irregularities in the allocation of plots under the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) New Town Project in Purbachal, near Dhaka. According to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), Hasina, in collusion with senior Rajuk officials, unlawfully secured six 10-katha plots in the diplomatic zone of Sector 27 of Purbachal New Town for herself and family members despite their ineligibility.
- **Abuse of Authority:** The ACC accused Hasina of abusing her authority as Prime Minister to influence officials to illegally secure the plots. Tulip Siddiq allegedly influenced her aunt to help her mother (Sheikh Rehana) and siblings acquire plots in the government project, playing a role in securing plots for other relatives through misuse of power.
- **Previous Corruption Convictions:** Between November 27 and December 1, 2025, Hasina had already been sentenced to 26 years' rigorous imprisonment in four other graft cases related to the same Purbachal project. In those cases, her children Sajeeb Wazed and Saima Wazed received five years each, and her sister Sheikh Rehana was sentenced to seven years.
- **Total Sentences:** With the latest verdict, Sheikh Hasina's total prison sentence in corruption cases related to the Purbachal project now stands at 36 years (10 years from the current cases plus 26 years from previous convictions).
- **Hasina's Exile Status:** Sheikh Hasina has been living in exile in India since August 5, 2024, after fleeing Bangladesh amid massive student-led protests against her government. She was ousted following a student-led mass uprising that ended her 15-year rule. The court had earlier declared her a fugitive for failing to appear during trial proceedings.

Responsible Nations Index 2026: Complete Rankings and Analysis

In the News: The World Intellectual Foundation (WIF) launched the Responsible Nations Index (RNI) at the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre in New Delhi, in the presence of former President of India Ram Nath Kovind. This groundbreaking index represents India's first globally anchored framework for evaluating national responsibility, assessing 154 countries based on ethical governance, social welfare, environmental stewardship, and global accountability rather than traditional GDP or military power metrics.

Key Points:

- **Index Launch:** The Responsible Nations Index was officially launched on January 19, 2026, at the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi. Former President of India Ram Nath Kovind graced the launch ceremony, underscoring the national significance of this initiative.
- **Development Partnership:** The index is developed by the World Intellectual Foundation (WIF) in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Indian Institute of Management Mumbai (IIM Mumbai), and the Dr. Ambedkar International Centre. This
- **Scope and Coverage:** The index evaluates 154 countries worldwide, making it one of the most comprehensive assessments of national responsibility.
- **Four Pillars Expansion:** The index is structured around three key dimensions: Internal responsibility, Environmental responsibility, and External responsibility.
- **Top 10 Global Rankings:** Singapore leads with a score of 0.6194 (61.9%), followed by Switzerland at 0.5869 (58.7%), Denmark at 0.5837 (58.4%), Cyprus at 0.5774 (57.7%), Sweden at 0.5740 (57.4%), Czechia (6th), Belgium (7th), Georgia (8th), Austria (9th), Croatia (10th).
- **India's Performance:** India ranks 16th globally with a responsibility score of 0.5515 (55.15%), demonstrating significant progress in ethical governance, social welfare initiatives, environmental commitments, and global accountability. India's position in the top 20 reflects its balanced approach across multiple responsibility dimensions.
- **Singapore's Leadership:** Singapore's score of 61.9% sets the global benchmark for responsible national conduct. Singapore is the only Asian country in the top 10, the document also states India ranks 16th and is described in multiple sources as "the top-ranked Asian nation suggesting Singapore's classification may be contextual
- **South Asian Context:** Within South Asia, India leads at 16th position, while Pakistan ranks 90th. This significant gap highlights different approaches to governance, social welfare, and environmental responsibility within the region.

United States and India Reach Trade Deal, Tariffs Reduced to 18%

In the News: U.S. President Donald Trump announced that the United States and India have reached a trade deal following a direct call with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The agreement reduces the reciprocal tariff itself from 25% to 18% and includes India's commitment to increase purchases of American products and shift oil imports away from Russia toward the United States and potentially Venezuela. Tariffs that had risen as high as 50% were reduced, with the reciprocal tariff lowered from 25% to 18%.

Key Points:

- **Tariff Reduction:** The U.S. reduced its "reciprocal tariff" on Indian goods from 50% to 18%, effective immediately. The 50% rate comprised a 25% reciprocal tariff plus a punitive 25% duty imposed in August 2025 for India's purchase of Russian oil. The new 18% tariff rate is comparable to tariff levels applied to Southeast Asian goods entering the U.S. Effective tariffs had reached ~50%, but the reciprocal tariff itself was 25%.
- **Official Announcement:** President Trump announced the deal via Truth Social following a phone call with PM Modi on February 2, 2026. Trump stated the agreement was made out of friendship and respect for Prime Minister Modi and, as per his request.
- **Rescinding Punitive Duty:** A White House official told Reuters that the U.S. was rescinding the punitive 25% duty on all imports from India that had been imposed over its purchases of Russian oil. This duty had stacked on top of the 25% reciprocal tariff rate, creating the 50% total tariff burden.
- **Russian Oil Context:** India's energy choices have been a sensitive issue in U.S.-India relations, especially after Washington imposed higher tariffs in August 2025 citing India's continued Russian oil imports. Since Russia's invasion

of Ukraine in 2022, India had increased Russian oil imports to benefit from lower prices amid Western sanctions on Russian energy exports.

- **Venezuelan Oil Alternative:** Purchases of Venezuelan oil would help replace some Russian oil imports. Questions remain regarding the terms, pricing, and volumes of potential Venezuelan oil purchases. India has historically been a buyer of Venezuelan oil, including as recently as a year ago.

India-China Trade Surges to Historic USD 155 Billion Amid Diplomatic Recalibration

In the News: India and China recorded bilateral trade of USD 155.6 billion in 2025, marking the highest trade volume ever achieved between the two countries and representing a year-on-year growth of over 12 percent. Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong announced the milestone at the 2026 Chinese New Year Reception in New Delhi, highlighting that India's exports to China grew by 9.7 percent in 2025.

Key Points:

- **Record Bilateral Trade:** India-China bilateral trade reached USD 155.6 billion in 2025, surpassing all previous records and representing a 12 percent year-on-year growth. This volume places India-China bilateral trade among the largest trade relationships globally and exceeds India's trade with the United States, underlining China's centrality to India's external trade profile.
- **Indian Export Growth:** Indian exports to China rose 9.7 percent during 2025, demonstrating increasing international competitiveness and growing market access despite periodic trade tensions. Indian exports likely include iron ore, textiles, pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, chemical products, seafood, and precious metals—sectors where India maintains competitive advantages.
- **Tianjin Summit Turning Point:** Chinese Ambassador Xu pointed to the meeting between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Tianjin in August 31, 2025, held on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, as a crucial turning point. Xu stated the meeting led China-India relations from "a reset and fresh start" to "a new level of improvement."
- **Post-Standoff Normalization:** Since India and China ended the prolonged military face-off in the Ladakh sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in October 2024, both sides have taken steps to stabilize ties and address the boundary dispute. The standoff lasted over four years following the deadly Galwan Valley clash in June 2020 that killed 20 Indian soldiers and at least four Chinese troops, pushing relations to their lowest point in six decades.
- **Enhanced Diplomatic Engagement:** Exchanges at multiple levels have become more frequent since the disengagement process began, including re-activation of high-level diplomatic, economic, and institutional channels. Both sides have expanded diplomatic infrastructure through regular meetings between foreign secretaries, trade ministers, business delegations, and relevant government agencies.

Elon Musk Becomes the First Person With \$800 Billion Wealth

In the News: Elon Musk achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first individual on Earth to accumulate a net worth exceeding USD 800 billion, reaching an estimated USD 852 billion according to Forbes. This unprecedented achievement was catalyzed by a landmark corporate restructuring in which his rocket company SpaceX acquired his artificial intelligence company xAI. The merger added approximately USD 84 billion to Musk's personal net worth and created a combined entity valued at USD 1.25 trillion, making SpaceX his single most valuable asset and surpassing Tesla in financial importance.

Key Points:

- **Historic \$800 Billion Milestone:** Musk became the first person in history to reach a net worth exceeding USD 800 billion, with his total wealth estimated at USD 852 billion as of February 2026. This represents more than a numerical milestone—it reflects the convergence of transformative technologies including space exploration, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital communications.
- **SpaceX-xAI Merger Catalyst:** The SpaceX-xAI merger, completed in February 2026, created a combined entity valued at USD 1.25 trillion, making it one of the most significant corporate combinations in recent history. The merger was a strategic consolidation integrating AI research and development with space infrastructure, creating synergies between satellite-based communications, AI model training, computational resources, and autonomous systems.

- **Wealth Addition from Merger:** The corporate restructuring added approximately USD 84 billion to Musk's personal net worth, directly propelling him past the \$800 billion threshold. Before the merger, Musk owned around 42% of SpaceX (valued at USD 336 billion) and 49% of xAI (valued at USD 122 billion). After the acquisition, he holds a 43% stake in the combined company, now valued at USD 542 billion.
- **SpaceX as Largest Asset:** With xAI absorbed into SpaceX, the rocket and satellite company has become Musk's single most valuable asset, surpassing Tesla in financial importance. The merged SpaceX-xAI company contributes the largest component to Musk's wealth, with his 43% stake representing approximately USD 232 billion of his total net worth.
- **SpaceX's Strategic Importance:** SpaceX dominates commercial spaceflight with unparalleled capabilities in reusable rocket technology, satellite deployment, and space-based services. The Starlink satellite internet constellation represents a multi-hundred-billion-dollar opportunity, while substantial NASA, Department of Defense, and Space Force contracts provide recurring revenue and financial stability.
- **Tesla Holdings:** Despite SpaceX's emergence as the largest asset, Tesla remains a major contributor to Musk's wealth. He owns approximately 12% of Tesla directly, valued at roughly USD 178 billion, along with stock options worth approximately USD 124 billion. Combined direct ownership and options represent approximately USD 302 billion in Tesla-linked wealth.

India Joins BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies

In the News: India has officially joined the BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies (BCIC), marking a significant milestone in advancing industrial capabilities and supporting the manufacturing and MSME sectors. The formal joining was announced at an event organized by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, at Vanijya Bhavan, New Delhi. A Trust Fund Agreement was signed between DPIIT and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the National Productivity Council (NPC) was designated as the India Centre for BRICS Industrial Competencies.

Key Points:

- **BRICS Centre for Industrial Competencies:** BCIC is a multilateral platform designed as a one-stop centre providing integrated support services to manufacturing companies and MSMEs across BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The centre is launched in partnership with UNIDO, bringing together expertise from BRICS nations and international development experience.
- **Trust Fund Agreement Signed:** A formal Trust Fund Agreement was signed between DPIIT and UNIDO at the announcement event. The agreement was signed by Economic Adviser, DPIIT, Shri Agrim Kaushal, and Director, UNIDO, Dr. Cristiano Pasini, establishing financial and operational mechanisms for India's participation. The event was presided over by Secretary, DPIIT, Shri Amardeep Singh Bhatia.
- **National Productivity Council as India Centre:** The National Productivity Council (NPC) has been designated as the India Centre for BRICS Industrial Competencies, making it the primary institutional focal point for India's engagement. Under policy guidance from DPIIT and technical support from UNIDO, NPC will lead capacity building, productivity enhancement, and adoption of advanced manufacturing practices.
- **Focus on Industry 4.0 Competencies:** The primary focus of BCIC is strengthening Industry 4.0 capabilities—the integration of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), and advanced analytics into manufacturing processes. Industry 4.0 represents the fourth industrial revolution, characterized by smart factories, automated processes, and data-driven decision-making.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Participation:** The event brought together representatives from DPIIT, Ministry of MSME, Ministry of External Affairs, National Productivity Council, UNIDO, and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). This multi-stakeholder approach ensures the initiative is grounded in policy, responsive to business needs, and aligned with international standards.
- **NPC's Core Responsibilities:** Under its mandate, NPC will design and deliver training programs, workshops, and certification courses for developing industrial competencies; facilitate adoption of modern manufacturing methodologies and digital technologies; create knowledge resources and case studies; and engage with manufacturers, MSMEs, industry associations, and government agencies.

- **Support for Make in India:** The initiative supports India's ambitious manufacturing goals including the "Make in India" initiative and Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes. BCIC provides crucial support by helping Indian manufacturers meet international standards, adopt modern technologies, and improve global competitiveness.

World Government Summit 2026: Shaping Future Governments

In the News: The World Government Summit 2026 opened in Dubai on February 3, 2026, under the theme "Shaping Future Governments," bringing together an unprecedented gathering of over 6,250 participants including more than 60 heads of state and government, 500+ ministers, and representatives from over 150 governments.

Key Points:

- **Summit Theme and Scope:** The summit addresses central questions facing modern governments: how public institutions can remain responsive and effective amid rapid technological change, how to balance innovation with sustainability, how to strengthen international cooperation in a multipolar world, and how governance frameworks can be adapted to serve increasingly diverse populations.
- **Unprecedented Participation:** The 2026 summit features over 6,250 participants including 60+ heads of state and government, 500+ ministers, 87 Nobel laureates, over 700 global CEOs, and representatives from more than 80 international, regional, and academic organizations. The summit includes 445+ sessions with 450+ global speakers.
- **Future of Government Work:** Discussions focus on digital transformation in public administration, the role of artificial intelligence in government services, building public sector capabilities for the 21st century, maintaining public trust while adopting new technologies, and balancing efficiency with equity in service delivery.
- **Leadership in Uncertain Times:** The summit examines qualities and approaches modern leaders require to guide nations through geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, and rapid technological disruption, while fostering inclusive decision-making and maintaining public confidence amid complexity and change.
- **Public Finance and Investment Flows:** Significant attention is dedicated to how governments can fund essential services and infrastructure amid competing priorities, attract sustainable investment, and use fiscal policy to support both immediate needs and long-term development goals, including green finance and digital economy taxation.
- **Emerging Technologies and Policymaking:** Discussions explore how to harness AI for better decision-making while managing risks such as bias and job displacement, regulatory frameworks for emerging technologies, governance implications of digital currencies, and ensuring technological benefits reach all populations equitably.
- **IMF's Economic Resilience Assessment:** IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva addressed the summit, highlighting unexpected global economic resilience despite geopolitical tensions and trade policy uncertainty. The IMF has upgraded its global growth projections, including for the UAE and Gulf economies, reflecting robust regional performance.

US Congress Approves \$200 Million Security Aid for Baltic States Amid Rising Russia Tensions

In the News: The United States Congress approved a \$200 million security assistance package for the Baltic States—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—as concerns grow over increased Russian military activity along NATO's eastern flank. The funding, cleared under the Fiscal Year 2026 Defence Appropriations Act, was signed into law by US President Donald Trump, reinforcing Washington's commitment to NATO allies in Eastern Europe and strengthening regional deterrence.

Key Points:

- **Legislative Approval:** The \$200 million allocation forms part of the \$838.7 billion US defence budget for FY2026 and ensures continuity of the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI). The approval signals bipartisan support in the US Congress for maintaining a strong security posture in Eastern Europe, despite earlier internal discussions within the Pentagon about discontinuing the programme.
- **Baltic Security Initiative:** The funding is aimed at enhancing military preparedness, improving interoperability with NATO forces, and supporting defence modernisation in the Baltic region. The initiative reinforces deterrence capabilities for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which are located on NATO's easternmost frontier, bordering Russia and Belarus.

- **Strategic Geographic Significance:** The Baltic States are considered frontline NATO allies due to their geography and historical experience. The region has seen increased Russian military exercises, airspace violations including Russian fighter jets entering Estonian airspace, and hybrid threats such as cyber operations and disinformation campaigns.
- **Additional Financing for Estonia:** Beyond the core \$200 million allocation, the US Congress approved an additional \$10 million for Estonia under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programme. Estonia has previously used FMF funds to procure US-made defence equipment including HIMARS ammunition, Javelin anti-tank missile systems, and large-calibre artillery shells.
- **Article 4 Invocation Context:** The move aligns with Article 4 of the NATO Treaty, which allows member states to request consultations when they feel their security is under threat—a provision the Baltic States have previously invoked amid regional tensions and security concerns.

India Pays \$35.18 Million to UN Regular Budget for 2026, Joins Honour Roll

In the News: India paid \$35.18 million to the United Nations Regular Budget for 2026, earning a place on the UN's "honour roll" of countries that have paid their assessed contributions in full and on time. The payment was made within the 30-day due period prescribed under UN financial regulations, reflecting India's continued commitment to multilateralism and its responsibilities as a key member of the United Nations.

Key Points:

- **Honour Roll Recognition:** India joined the honour roll of 47 UN Member States that paid their regular budget assessments in full within the 30-day due period specified in UN financial regulations. The honour roll recognizes countries that demonstrate financial responsibility and timely compliance with UN obligations.
- **Payment Details:** India contributed \$35.18 million to the 2026 United Nations Regular Budget, representing its assessed share of 1.016% of the UN's regular budget. India's total contribution to the UN budget is \$38.223 million, with \$3.091 million offset for staff income taxes.
- **UN Regular Budget Purpose:** The UN Regular Budget funds the organization's core activities, including peace and security initiatives, development work, human rights programmes, and administrative functions. The budget covers UN operations except peacekeeping, with the 2026 regular budget totaling \$3.45 billion.
- **Official Announcement:** The development was highlighted during the daily press briefing by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General António Guterres. In a light-hearted moment, Dujarric posed a quiz-style question to journalists, referring to India as the country home to the Statue of Unity, the world's tallest statue at 182 metres, dedicated to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and located in Gujarat.
- **Assessment Methodology:** Each UN Member State is assessed a mandatory contribution based on its economic capacity, as decided by the UN Committee on Contributions. Timely payment of these dues is crucial for the smooth functioning of the UN, as delays can affect programme implementation and cash flow.

Bhutan Queen Mother Honoured with 22nd Upendra Nath Brahma 'Soldier of Humanity' Award 2025

In the News: Gyalyum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, the Queen Mother of Bhutan, was conferred the 22nd Upendra Nath Brahma 'Soldier of Humanity' Award 2025 at a special ceremony held at Bodoland University in Kokrajhar, Assam. The award recognizes her lifelong humanitarian service, compassionate leadership, and exceptional contributions to social development and cultural preservation, particularly through her work with the Tarayana Foundation.

Key Points:

- **Award Institution and Legacy:** The Upendra Nath Brahma 'Soldier of Humanity' Award was instituted in 2004 by the Upendra Nath Brahma Trust (UNBT). The Trust was established in 1999. It is named after Upendra Nath Brahma, popularly known as Bodofa (meaning guardian of the Bodo ethnic community), a revered Bodo leader and social reformer who championed sacrifice, courage, social justice, and service to humanity.
- **Award Components:** The award presented to the Queen Mother included a citation, a statuette/memento of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, traditional Bodo artefacts including Aronai (decorative scarf), Dokhna/Dokhona (women's attire), Gwmgra, Endi Sadar, Sereja (a musical instrument), and a cash prize of ₹2 lakh, symbolizing respect for Bodo culture and humanitarian values.

- **Ceremony Details:** The 22nd edition of the award ceremony took place at Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, a region closely associated with the legacy of Upendra Nath Brahma. Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended as the chief guest and highlighted the relevance of Bodo's philosophy in contemporary society.
- **Tarayana Foundation Leadership:** Gyalyum Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck is the founder-president of the Tarayana Foundation, through which she has led comprehensive rural development initiatives across remote regions of Bhutan. The foundation's work focuses on poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, education, healthcare, and the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage.
- **Humanitarian Impact:** Under the Queen Mother's visionary leadership, the Tarayana Foundation has significantly improved the lives of vulnerable communities, especially women and children, in Bhutan's remote and rural regions through sustainable development programs and inclusive growth initiatives.

Walmart Becomes World's First Retail Company to Reach USD 1 Trillion Market Value

In the News: Walmart Inc. became the world's first retail company to achieve a market capitalisation of USD 1 trillion, marking a historic milestone for the global retail industry. This landmark achievement followed a strong and sustained rally in Walmart's share price and reflects how traditional retail companies can leverage technology, scale, and innovation to compete with global technology giants.

Key Points:

- **Historic Milestone:** Walmart became the first traditional brick-and-mortar retailer to reach a \$1 trillion market valuation, joining an elite group of companies that have crossed this threshold. This achievement places Walmart among the world's most valuable corporations, distinguishing it as the only pure retail company at this valuation level.
- **Strong Stock Performance:** Walmart's shares increased by nearly 26% over the last 12 months and surged by approximately 468% over the past 10 years. This performance significantly outpaced the S&P 500 index, which gained about 264% during the same decade, reflecting strong investor confidence in the company's long-term business model.
- **Elite Corporate Group:** With its \$1 trillion valuation, Walmart joined a select group of global corporations including Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Meta, Nvidia, Tesla, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, and Broadcom. Investment firm Berkshire Hathaway and drug-maker Eli Lilly had also previously reached this milestone.
- **Nasdaq-100 Inclusion:** In December 2025, Walmart was included in the Nasdaq-100 index, which tracks the world's most valuable non-financial companies listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange. The company also moved its stock from the New York Stock Exchange to the tech-heavy Nasdaq, reinforcing its push to be seen as a digital and technology-enabled enterprise.
- **Artificial Intelligence Investments:** Walmart invested billions of dollars in AI-powered supply chains to improve inventory planning, enhance fresh produce delivery, and increase delivery speed and efficiency. These efforts helped Walmart exceed same-store sales estimates for 15 consecutive quarters, strengthening revenue growth and investor confidence.
- **Company Background:** Founded in 1962, Walmart is the world's largest retailer by revenue and operates thousands of stores across multiple countries. The company has transformed from a traditional brick-and-mortar retailer into a technology-driven, omnichannel giant combining physical stores with e-commerce, data analytics, and advanced logistics.

India-GCC FTA Terms of Reference Signed: Building Bridges Across the Arabian Sea

In the News: India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) signed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the India-GCC Free Trade Agreement at Vanijya Bhawan, New Delhi. The ToR was signed by Ajay Bhadoo (Additional Secretary and Chief Negotiator, Department of Commerce) and Dr. Raja Al Marzouqi (Chief Negotiator, Secretariat General of the GCC) in the presence of Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of State Jitin Prasada, and Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal. This milestone marks the formal beginning of FTA negotiations between India and the six GCC nations, aiming to strengthen trade, energy security, and investment cooperation.

Key Points:

- **What Are Terms of Reference:** The ToR acts as a roadmap for the India-GCC FTA negotiations, defining the scope, structure, negotiation modalities, and goals of the agreement. It provides clarity and predictability for businesses and investors, ensuring systematic progress in reducing trade barriers and avoiding confusion during discussions.
- **India's Trade with GCC:** India's trade with GCC stood at USD 178.56 billion in FY 2024-25, accounting for 15.42% of India's total global trade. Exports totaled USD 56.87 billion while imports were USD 121.68 billion. Over the last five years, India-GCC trade has grown at an annual average rate of 15.3%, making GCC one of India's largest trading partners.
- **Key Export Sectors:** India's major exports to GCC include engineering goods, rice, textiles, machinery, gems and jewelry. These sectors are expected to benefit significantly from reduced tariffs and improved market access under the FTA.
- **Key Import Sectors:** India primarily imports crude oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), petrochemicals, and precious metals such as gold from GCC nations. The FTA is crucial for India's energy security, ensuring stable supplies and supporting diversification of energy sources.
- **About Gulf Cooperation Council:** The GCC was established in 1981 as a regional political and economic alliance with headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Its six member countries are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The council was formed due to regional tensions including the Iranian Revolution (1979) and Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).

In CIA's Decision to Shutter World Factbook, Information Becomes Collateral Damage

In the News: The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) announced the shutdown of its popular reference manual, the CIA World Factbook, after more than 60 years of continuous publication. The foreign intelligence service stated that "The World Factbook served the Intelligence Community and the general public as a longstanding, one-stop basic reference about countries and communities around the globe."

Key Points:

- **Historical Origins:** The Factbook's roots trace back to World War II when the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's precursor, was created in June 1942 under General William Donovan following the Pearl Harbor intelligence failure. The OSS established the Joint Army Navy Intelligence Studies (JANIS) programme.
- **Evolution of Publication:** First launched in 1962 as "The National Basic Intelligence Factbook," it was initially a classified publication for intelligence officers. The CIA released an unclassified version in 1971, made it available to the public in 1975, and renamed it "The World Factbook" in 1981. The major milestone came in 1997 when it went online, becoming a widely accessible public resource.
- **Public Impact and Usage:** After going online in 1997, the Factbook became an essential resource for the U.S. Government, educational institutions, journalists, researchers, trivia enthusiasts, and countless private citizens, racking up millions of visits per year. As the CIA noted: "Before there was a Wikipedia to search on, before there was a Bing to consult, and most certainly before 'Google' became a verb, there was CIA's World Factbook."
- **Reason for Shutdown:** While the CIA offered no official explanation in its announcement, the decision likely stems from CIA Director John Ratcliffe's pledge to end programmes that don't advance the agency's core missions. In May 2025, reports indicated the Trump administration planned to reduce the CIA workforce by 1,200 over several years, forcing the agency to "do more with less."

World Bank Highlights Karnataka's Fiscal Strategy for Other States

In the News: A World Bank study on off-budget borrowings flagged Karnataka's fiscal reporting approach as a good-practice example for other States, noting its attempt to broaden debt recognition and reduce the scope for hidden liabilities outside the formal budget.

Key Points:

- **What the World Bank highlighted:** The study notes that Karnataka amended its fiscal responsibility legislation (2014) to include borrowings by public sector undertakings (PSUs) and special purpose vehicles (SPVs) from their own operations, even when those borrowings are not backed by explicit government guarantees, within the State's recognised liabilities.

- **Why this matters:** Off-budget borrowings can understate the true fiscal deficit and debt stock, because spending is effectively financed through entities outside the budget while the repayment risk ultimately rests with the State.
- **What counts as off-budget borrowing:** Common channels include borrowing by State PSUs/SPVs, borrowings routed through infrastructure corporations, and repayment commitments serviced through future budgetary support or earmarked revenues.
- **Key fiscal risk:** Off-budget liabilities can become contingent liabilities and crystallise during revenue shocks, forcing abrupt fiscal adjustment or higher market borrowing costs.
- **Transparency and comparability:** Broader liability recognition improves fiscal transparency, makes inter-State comparisons more meaningful, and supports more accurate debt sustainability assessments by investors and oversight institutions.
- **Institutional linkage:** Fiscal responsibility frameworks and debt disclosure practices shape how States manage guarantees, contingent liabilities, and quasi-fiscal activities undertaken through PSUs and SPVs.
- **Policy takeaways for other States:** The Karnataka approach is cited as a template for improving comprehensive debt reporting, discouraging excessive off-budget financing, and strengthening accountability through fuller disclosure of liabilities.

US Lifts Additional 25% Tariff After India's Russian Oil Commitment

In the News: The United States removed an additional 25% punitive tariff on Indian goods with effect from 7 February 2026 after the White House said India had committed to stop directly or indirectly importing Russian oil, as part of an interim India-US trade framework released on 6 February 2026.

Key Points:

- **Executive order and effective date:** A presidential order terminated the extra 25% duty from 12:01 a.m. Eastern Time on 7 February 2026, while indicating that monitoring and reimposition mechanisms could apply if conditions are not met.
- **Interim trade framework (06 Feb 2026):** The interim framework is intended to move both sides toward a broader bilateral trade pact, lowering tariffs and addressing market-access issues while expanding cooperation in areas such as defence and supply chains.
- **Russian oil-related commitment:** The White House order explicitly states that India committed to stop importing Russian Federation oil directly or indirectly; it also references commitments to purchase US energy products and expand defence cooperation.
- **Tariff structure in the framework:** Alongside removal of the penalty tariff, reports indicate the US will apply an 18% tariff on most Indian imports under the interim framework, with further negotiations aimed at a more comprehensive agreement.
- **India-side trade commitments (reported):** India is expected to reduce or eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers on a range of US industrial and agricultural products, while safeguarding selected sensitive sectors.
- **Timeline for a broader deal:** Reporting around the framework indicates a target to conclude a wider trade agreement by March 2026, depending on progress on tariff lines, standards, and market-access deliverables.
- **Implications for India:** The tariff rollback reduces immediate pressure on Indian exporters and supply chains but introduces uncertainty around energy-import decisions, compliance monitoring, and the durability of the tariff concession.

SCIENCE AND TECH

From Odisha to Orbit-Ready Precision: Agni-III Passes Key Test

In the News: On 6 February 2026, India successfully test-fired the intermediate-range ballistic missile Agni-III from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur, Odisha, validating operational and technical parameters under the aegis of the Strategic Forces Command.

Key Points:

- **Test details:** The launch was conducted from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur (Odisha) as a routine training exercise, and official statements said all mission objectives and technical parameters were validated.
- **System profile:** Agni-III is a two-stage, solid-fuelled intermediate-range ballistic missile with a strike range exceeding 3,000 km and the capability to carry conventional as well as nuclear warheads.
- **Operational stewardship:** The test was carried out under the aegis/supervision of the Strategic Forces Command, which manages India's strategic missile forces under the nuclear command-and-control framework.
- **Deterrence significance:** The Agni-III is described as a key component of India's credible minimum deterrence posture, and periodic training launches are used to validate readiness and technical preparedness.
- **Induction timeline:** Open-source official reporting notes that Agni-III has been inducted into the Strategic Forces Command since 2011, and the successful test underscores continued focus on operational readiness.

ENVIRONMENT

Veerabhadran Ramanathan and the Nobel of Geosciences

In the News: Indian-origin climate scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan was awarded the prestigious 2026 Crafoord Prize in Geosciences by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. Often described as the "Nobel of Geosciences," the prize recognizes Ramanathan's decades of groundbreaking research on super-pollutants and atmospheric brown clouds, which have fundamentally reshaped the understanding of global warming and influenced key international environmental treaties.

Key Points:

- **Award Recognition:** The 82-year-old scientist received the Crafoord Prize, one of the highest honors in Earth sciences, for his pioneering work on climate change. The prize carries a cash award of 8 million Swedish kronor (approximately \$900,000) and a gold medal, to be presented during Crafoord Days in Stockholm and Lund in May 2026.
- **Early Life and Career:** Born in Madurai and raised in Chennai, Ramanathan began his career as an engineer in a refrigerator factory in Secunderabad, where he first handled chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). He later earned degrees from Annamalai University and the Indian Institute of Science before moving to the United States for higher education.
- **Landmark 1975 Discovery:** While working at NASA's Langley Research Center, Ramanathan made a groundbreaking discovery that CFCs, widely used in aerosols and refrigeration, trap heat in the atmosphere up to 10,000 times more effectively than carbon dioxide. His landmark paper in "Science" demonstrated that gases other than CO₂ could drive global warming, fundamentally changing climate science.
- **Trace Gases Research:** Ramanathan's research revealed that trace gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and CFCs could accelerate warming far faster than previously estimated. Until 1975, global warming was believed to be mainly from CO₂, making his discovery revolutionary in understanding climate change mechanisms.
- **Indian Ocean Experiment (INDOEX):** Ramanathan led pioneering research identifying atmospheric brown clouds over South Asia. The study linked air pollution to a weakened Indian Monsoon and accelerated melting of Himalayan glaciers, demonstrating how pollution can temporarily mask warming while causing regional climate impacts and health damage.

Gujarat Reclaims 'Tiger State' Status

In the News: Gujarat regained its status as a tiger-bearing state after 33 years following the sustained presence of a four-year-old Royal Bengal Tiger in the Jambughoda and Ratanmahal forest ranges of Central Gujarat. This milestone makes Gujarat the only state in India to host all three major big cats: Asiatic Lions, Royal Bengal Tigers, and Leopards, marking a significant achievement in India's wildlife conservation history.

Key Points:

- **Tiger Migration:** The tiger traveled approximately 60 km from Kathiwada Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh's Alirajpur district into Gujarat's Dahod district (Kanjeta range) before reaching Kevdi in Chhota Udepur district. The 90-km corridor from Kanjeta to Kevdi and Jambughoda comprises dense, hilly forest patches with natural caves, water sources, and minimal human habitation.
- **Official Announcement:** In December 2025, Gujarat's Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia announced the tiger's sustained presence, marking Gujarat's return as a tiger-bearing state after 33 years.
- **Unique Biodiversity Status:** Gujarat is now the only state in India to host three major big cat species simultaneously: Asiatic Lions (Gir Forest), Royal Bengal Tigers (Ratanmahal-Jambughoda corridor), and Leopards (various forest regions).
- **Herbivore Breeding Centre:** Established in 2024 near Kada dam in Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary to augment the prey base. One 555-sq metre enclosure holds approximately 50 spotted deer (chital) including 16 males, 25 females, and 9 fawns. Another 250-sq metre enclosure contains 33 sambar (15 males, 12 females, 6 fawns). The centre features 15-feet-tall fences, electrified barbed wire, and galvanized iron sheets to protect breeding stock from leopards.
- **Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary:** Located in Panchmahal district, characterized by dry southern tropical and dry deciduous forests with grasslands and medicinal herbs. Dominated by Teak, Mahua, and Bamboo thickets providing dense cover. Supports significant populations of Leopards, Sloth Bears, Chousinghas (four-horned antelope), Nilgais, and Hyenas.
- **Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary:** Established in 1982 along Gujarat's border with Madhya Pradesh. Known for hosting Gujarat's highest population of Sloth Bears. Features dry teak and mixed deciduous forests with Bamboo, Mahua, and Jamun trees. Serves as the catchment area for River Panam, supporting water conservation for Dahod and Panchmahal districts.
- **Legal Framework:** Section 11(1)(a) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, empowers State Chief Wild Life Wardens to grant permits for hunting Schedule I animals that become dangerous to human life. Section 11(1)(b) covers Schedule II, III, IV and property (including standing crops).

IMPORTANT DAYS

World Wetlands Day 2026: Can Traditional Knowledge Save Disappearing Wetlands?

In the News: World Wetlands Day is being observed globally with the theme "Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage." The observance highlights how indigenous peoples and local communities have protected wetlands for centuries through traditional practices, emphasizing that combining scientific approaches with age-old wisdom can help conserve these rapidly vanishing ecosystems that are essential for biodiversity, water security, and millions of livelihoods worldwide.

Key Points:

- **What is World Wetlands Day:** Celebrated annually on February 2 to commemorate the signing of the Ramsar Convention in 1971 at Ramsar, Iran. The day raises awareness about wetlands including lakes, marshes, mangroves, floodplains, and lagoons, which provide clean water, reduce floods, store carbon, and support rich biodiversity.
- **2026 Theme Explained:** "Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge: Celebrating Cultural Heritage" recognizes the role of indigenous peoples and local communities in wetland conservation. For generations, fishing communities, pastoral groups, and forest dwellers have managed wetlands through sustainable harvesting, seasonal use, and cultural restrictions, ensuring ecological balance without modern technology.
- **India's Wetland Leadership:** India hosts 98 Ramsar sites, the highest number in South Asia, covering approximately 1.35 million hectares. Indian wetlands are deeply connected to culture, religion, and livelihoods, with examples including Chilika Lake (supporting traditional fishing communities) and Sundarbans Wetland (sustaining livelihoods through honey collection and fishing).
- **Eight Categories of Indian Wetlands:** Classified into Himalayan lakes, Gangetic floodplain marshes, Deccan plateau reservoirs, coastal lagoons, mangroves, saline wetlands, northeast swamps, and island ecosystems. Each category has evolved with local knowledge systems adapted to climate, terrain, and water availability.

- **Legal Framework in India:** The Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 provide the legal framework for wetland protection, requiring states to identify wetlands, restrict polluting activities, and prepare management plans. The rules encourage community participation, though implementation gaps remain due to weak enforcement and competing development interests.
- **World Heritage-Wetland Connections:** Almost 120 World Heritage properties overlap wholly or partially with more than 170 Ramsar wetlands, with around one-third inscribed for their cultural values. Examples include Itsukushima Shinto Shrine (Japan), Venice and its Lagoon (Italy), Budj Bim Cultural Landscape (Australia), and Saloum Delta (Senegal).

ECONOMY

Ministry of Statistics Revise Consumer Price Index Base Year to 2024

In the News: The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) announced a comprehensive revision of India's Consumer Price Index (CPI), shifting the base year from 2012 to 2024. This major overhaul, based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24, represents the most substantial update to India's primary inflation measurement tool in over a decade. The first CPI 2024 data is scheduled for release on February 12, 2026, with significant changes including reduced food weight, increased housing weight, an expanded basket of 358 items, and incorporation of online market data for the first time.

Key Points:

- **Base Year Revision:** The CPI base year has been updated from 2012 to 2024 to reflect dramatically transformed consumption patterns of Indian households in the post-pandemic era. The revision is based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24, which captures detailed household spending data across all states and union territories.
- **Food & Beverages Weight Reduction:** The weight of Food & Beverages in the CPI basket has been reduced from 45.86% to 36.75%, a decline of approximately 9 percentage points. This reflects rising incomes and dietary diversification, consistent with Engel's Law that as incomes rise, food's share of expenditure declines.
- **Housing Weight Surge:** Housing weight has nearly doubled from 16.91% to 17.66%, reflecting rising real estate prices, rental costs, urbanization, and improved measurement methods including imputed rent for owner-occupied properties. Housing inflation will now have significantly greater impact on overall CPI inflation.
- **Expanded Item Basket:** The CPI basket expands from 299 items to 358 items (approximately 20% increase), incorporating new products and services such as e-commerce products, digital services, streaming subscriptions, and other contemporary consumption categories to better capture modern spending patterns.
- **Education as Standalone Category:** Education has been elevated from a subcategory to a standalone category, reflecting rising household expenditure on education and its growing importance in household budgets. This enables separate tracking of education inflation for targeted policy responses.
- **COICOP 2018 Adoption:** The revised CPI adopts the Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose (COICOP) 2018 framework, an international standard developed by the UN Statistical Commission. This enables direct comparison of India's CPI with other countries and ensures statistical consistency with global best practices.
- **Release Timeline:** The first CPI 2024 data will be released on February 12, 2026. MoSPI will release a linking factor between CPI 2012 and CPI 2024 to enable comparison and maintain continuity in historical inflation analysis.

SPORTS

IOC Elects First Female Member from Iran, Marking a Historic Moment in Olympic Governance

In the News: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) elected Iranian badminton player Soraya Aghaei Hajiagha as its first-ever female member from Iran during the 145th IOC Session held in Milan, Italy. This historic election marks a significant milestone for gender representation, inclusivity, and Iran's engagement with the global Olympic movement.

Key Points:

- **Historic Election:** Soraya Aghaei was elected as the 107th member of the IOC through a decisive 95–2 vote. She became the first woman from Iran to join the IOC in its 132-year history and only the third Iranian member overall, making her the first Iranian representative since 2004.
- **Youngest IOC Member:** At 30 years old, Aghaei became the youngest current member of the IOC at the time of her election. She joins an exclusive body that includes former Olympic athletes, leaders of international sports bodies, members of royal families, former political leaders, diplomats, and industrialists.
- **About the International Olympic Committee:** The IOC is the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement, responsible for organizing the Olympic Games, promoting Olympic values, and overseeing global sports governance. Membership is highly selective, making it one of the most exclusive international sports bodies in the world.
- **Aghaei's Athletic Background:** Soraya Aghaei competed in badminton at the Tokyo Summer Games held in 2021, becoming Iran's first female Olympian in the sport. She is a member of the Iranian Olympic body's athletes commission and represents a new generation of athletic leadership.
- **Eight-Year Term:** Aghaei's eight-year term on the IOC will include significant responsibilities such as voting to choose a host for the 2036 Summer Games and participating in key decisions regarding global sports governance and Olympic policy-making.

ICC U-19 World Cup 2026 Final: India Outclass England and Lift The Trophy

In the News: India claimed their record-extending 6th ICC Under-19 Men's Cricket World Cup title by defeating England by 100 runs in the final on Friday, February 7, 2026. India posted a record-breaking total of 411/9, the highest ever in an Under-19 World Cup final, powered by 14-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's sensational 175 off 80 balls. England were bowled out for 311 despite a fighting century from Caleb Falconer. The victory further cemented India's dominance at the youth level and showcased the country's unmatched depth in producing world-class cricket talent.

Key Points:

- **Record-Breaking Total:** India posted 411/9 in 50 overs, setting the highest team total in Under-19 World Cup final history. This mammoth score surpassed all previous records and put England under immense pressure from the start of their chase.
- **Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's Historic Innings:** The 14-year-old prodigy played arguably the greatest knock in Under-19 World Cup history, smashing 175 runs off just 80 balls. His innings included 13 sixes and 13 fours (some reports mention 15 sixes), making it a display of fearless and destructive batting that drew comparisons with Kapil Dev's immortal 175 against Zimbabwe at the 1983 World Cup.
- **Fastest Century in Final:** Sooryavanshi reached his fifty in 32 balls and converted it to a century in just 55 deliveries, showcasing exceptional stroke-play and temperament. He became the highest individual scorer in an Under-19 World Cup final, missing a potential double century by just 25 runs.
- **Captain's Contribution:** India's captain Ayush Mhatre scored a valuable 53 off 51 balls before Sooryavanshi's fireworks. The duo added 142 runs for the second wicket, laying the foundation for India's record total despite Aaron George's early dismissal for 9.
- **England's Collapse:** Chasing 412, England imploded spectacularly, collapsing from 93/1 to 177/7, losing six wickets for just 84 runs. Despite early promise from Ben Dawkins and Ben Mayes (45), regular wickets derailed their chase completely.
- **India's U-19 Legacy:** This victory marks India's 6th Under-19 World Cup title, extending their record as the most successful nation in the tournament's history. The triumph showcases India's continued dominance in youth cricket and their ability to consistently produce exceptional talent for international cricket.

Sooryavanshi Smashes Record 175 in U-19 World Cup Final Against England

In the News: 14-year-old Indian prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi delivered one of the most explosive knocks in cricket history, smashing a sensational 175 runs off just 80 balls in the ICC Under-19 Men's Cricket World Cup final against England in Harare. His innings, which included 15 fours and 15 sixes at a strike rate of 218.75, became the highest individual score ever in an Under-19 World Cup final and in any ICC tournament final (senior or U-19 level). The record-breaking

performance helped India post 411/9 and ultimately claim their 6th U-19 World Cup title by defeating England by 100 runs.

Key Points:

- **Highest Score in U-19 WC Final:** Sooryavanshi's 175 is the highest individual score in a final or knockout game in Youth ODIs, surpassing Sameer Minhas' 172 against India in the 2026 Asia Cup final. It also became the highest score by any batter in an ICC tournament final at any level, breaking Alyssa Healy's record of 170 in the 2022 women's ODI World Cup final.
- **Record-Breaking Innings Construction:** The young opener reached his half-century in just 32 balls, followed by a second fifty in only 23 balls, completing his century in 55 deliveries. This was the second-fastest century at an Under-19 World Cup (behind Will Malajczuk's 51-ball ton against Japan) and the fifth-fastest hundred in Youth ODIs overall.
- **India's U-19 WC Highest Score:** With 175 runs, Sooryavanshi became the highest individual scorer for India in Under-19 World Cup history, surpassing Raj Bawa's 162 not out against Uganda in 2022. Overall, it is the second-highest score for India in Youth ODIs, behind only Ambati Rayudu's 177 not out from 2002 (also against England).
- **Six-Hitting Records:** Sooryavanshi hit 15 sixes during his 175, the most by any batter in a single Youth ODI innings, breaking his own previous record of 14 sixes against UAE in December. He finished the tournament with 30 sixes, shattering Dewald Brevis' record of 18 sixes (set in 2022) for most sixes in a single U-19 World Cup edition and becoming the all-time leading six-hitter in U-19 World Cup history.
- **Boundary Runs Record:** Sooryavanshi scored 150 runs from boundaries alone (15 fours and 15 sixes), setting another record at Youth ODI level. The previous highest was 124 boundary runs by Hasitha Boyagoda during his 191 against Kenya in 2018. He hit 30 boundaries in total, joint-most in an innings alongside Boyagoda.
- **Career Six-Hitting Dominance:** Sooryavanshi has hit 110 total sixes from 25 innings in Youth ODIs, twice more than the second-best (Zawad Abrar with 55 sixes), establishing complete dominance in power-hitting at this level. He has hit ten or more sixes in an innings on five occasions, while all other batters combined have done it only three times.

2026 Winter Olympics: Host Country, Location, Schedule, Results & India

In the News: The 2026 Winter Olympics, officially known as Milano Cortina 2026, will be held in Italy from February 6-22, 2026. This marks the 25th edition of the Winter Olympics and Italy's third time hosting the Winter Games after Cortina d'Ampezzo (1956) and Turin (2006). The Opening Ceremony will take place on February 6, 2026, at the Milano San Siro Olympic Stadium, with a unique format featuring simultaneous ceremonies at multiple Olympic venues including Livigno, Predazzo, and Cortina. The Games will feature 16 winter sports with 93 participating nations, organized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Key Points:

- **Host Country and Cities:** Italy will host the 2026 Winter Olympics following a multi-city model. Events will be held across Milan, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Bormio, and Val di Fiemme, highlighting Italy's modern cities and alpine regions. This distributed approach showcases both urban infrastructure and traditional mountain sports venues.
- **Official Dates:** The official 2026 Winter Olympics dates are February 6-22, 2026. Early events in curling and women's ice hockey will begin on February 4-5, 2026. The Opening Ceremony is scheduled for February 6, while the Closing Ceremony will take place on February 22, 2026. Main competitions will run from February 7-21, 2026.
- **Sports and Events:** The Games will feature 16 winter sports including Alpine Skiing, Biathlon, Cross-Country Skiing, Snowboarding, Figure Skating, Speed Skating, Short Track Speed Skating, Ice Hockey, Curling, Bobsleigh, Skeleton, Luge, and Nordic Combined. The schedule includes early curling mixed doubles (Feb 4), figure skating team finals (Feb 9), and ice hockey finals (Feb 19-21).
- **Unique Opening Ceremony Format:** Unlike previous Opening Ceremonies where all delegations enter at one venue, Milano Cortina 2026 will see most athletes parade at the sites closest to where they will compete during the Games. Ceremonies will occur simultaneously at Milano San Siro Olympic Stadium, Livigno, Predazzo, and Cortina, creating a historic distributed celebration.
- **India's Participation:** India will participate in the 2026 Winter Olympics with a small contingent competing in Alpine Skiing and Cross-Country Skiing. The confirmed Indian athletes are Arif Mohammad Khan (Alpine Skiing) and Stanzin

Lundup (Cross-Country Skiing). While medal chances are limited, India's participation promotes winter sports in Himalayan regions and provides international exposure.

AWARDS

Rouble Nagi Wins Global Teacher Prize In Dubai

In the News: Indian teacher and social activist Rouble Nagi was awarded the prestigious Global Teacher Prize in Dubai, earning \$1 million and international recognition for her transformative work in providing education to children in urban slums across India. The award was presented by Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed, Crown Prince of Dubai, at the World Governments Summit.

Key Points:

- **Award Recognition:** Rouble Nagi became the 10th recipient of the Global Teacher Prize, often called the "Nobel of Teaching," which has been awarded since 2015 to recognize exceptional educators worldwide. The prize carries \$1 million in prize money, funded by GEMS Education.
- **Educational Impact:** Nagi has reached over 1 million children through her initiatives, establishing more than 800 learning centres across India in slums and villages. She has recruited and trained over 600 volunteer and paid educators to manage daily instruction.
- **Misaal Mumbai Initiative:** Under this slum transformation project, Nagi has painted and repaired more than 1,50,000 homes and is currently working in over 163 slums and villages across India. The initiative combined education with community development, improving sanitation, waterproofing, and conducting hygiene workshops.
- **Rouble Nagi Art Foundation:** Her non-profit organization provides low-cost, art-based education to underprivileged children, focusing on sustainable educational models. The foundation's programs aim to reduce dropout rates and provide skill-based learning relevant to family livelihoods.
- **Professional Background:** Rouble Nagi is an award-winning artist from Jammu and Kashmir with a studio in Mumbai. She holds a BA in Political Science and studied Fine Art at Slade School of Fine Art and European Art at Sotheby's London. She is a member of the India Design Council and has created over 800 murals with more than 150 exhibitions worldwide.

UNION BUDGET FY 2026-27 SPECIAL

Budget Snapshot:

- The **Union Budget 2026-27** was presented on **1 February 2026**, and is framed as a "**Yuva Shakti-driven**" Budget guided by 3 "**kartavya**"—(i) accelerate and sustain growth, (ii) fulfil aspirations/build capacity, and (iii) ensure **Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas**.
- The Union Budget 2026-27, presented on **1 February 2026**, was the **ninth consecutive budget** delivered by **Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman**.
- This was the first time in Indian parliamentary history that the **Union Budget was presented on a Sunday**. It marked the first budget prepared and presented from the newly established Kartavya Bhawan.
- The Budget follows the standard structure of **Part A (policy + expenditure priorities)** and **Part B (tax proposals)**.
- Public capital expenditure (capex) is proposed at ₹12.2 lakh crore in FY 2026-27 to continue the infrastructure push.
- The fiscal deficit target for FY 2026-27 is 4.3% of GDP (with FY 2025-26 RE at 4.4%).
- For FY 2026-27 (BE), non-debt receipts are estimated at ₹36.5 lakh crore, and total expenditure at ₹53.5 lakh crore; the Centre's net tax receipts are estimated at ₹28.7 lakh crore.
- To finance the deficit, net market borrowings (dated securities) are estimated at ₹11.7 lakh crore, and gross market borrowings at ₹17.2 lakh crore.

Part A (Budget Priorities and Spending Proposals)

- The Budget is described as a “**Yuva Shakti-driven**” Budget inspired by **three “Kartavya”**: (i) accelerating and sustaining economic growth, (ii) fulfilling aspirations and building capacity, and (iii) aligning with **Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas** towards a **Viksit Bharat**.
- A **Reform Express** approach is used to combine **policy reforms** with **targeted public investment**, with an emphasis on the poor, underprivileged and disadvantaged.

1) Growth and Manufacturing

- **Biopharma SHAKTI** is proposed with an outlay of **₹10,000 crore (over 5 years)** to build an ecosystem for domestic production of **biologics and biosimilars**, including a biopharma-focused network and new capacity-building institutions.
- **ISM 2.0** is proposed to strengthen semiconductor sector capabilities, focusing on equipment/materials, full-stack Indian IP, supply chains, and industry-led research and training.
- The **Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme** outlay is proposed to be increased to **₹40,000 crore** (from ₹22,919 crore).
- For textiles, an **Integrated Programme** is proposed with multiple sub-parts including the **National Fibre Scheme**, cluster modernisation, handloom/handcraft integration, and skilling upgrades (Samarth 2.0).

2) MSMEs and “Champion SMEs”

- A dedicated **₹10,000 crore SME Growth Fund** is proposed to create future “Champion SMEs”, along with a **₹2,000 crore** top-up for the Self-Reliant India Fund to support micro enterprises’ risk capital.
- **TReDS** is further strengthened through measures such as mandating it for CPSE purchases from MSMEs and creating additional credit support and secondary-market liquidity for MSME receivables.

3) Infrastructure, Cities, and Climate

- **Public capex** is proposed at **₹12.2 lakh crore** for FY 2026–27.
- **City Economic Regions (CERs)** are proposed for Tier II/Tier III cities and temple towns, with an allocation of **₹5,000 crore per CER over 5 years** through a reform-and-results financing mechanism.
- **Seven High-Speed Rail corridors** are proposed as “growth connectors” to promote environmentally sustainable passenger systems.
- **CCUS** (Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage) is proposed with an outlay of **₹20,000 crore (over 5 years)** to scale deployment across key industrial sectors.

4) Emerging Tech, Education, Tourism, and Sports

- **AVGC Content Creator Labs** are proposed in **15,000 secondary schools and 500 colleges** through support to the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies, Mumbai.
- To address challenges for girl students in STEM higher education, **one girls’ hostel in every district** is proposed through VGF/capital support.
- A **Khelo India Mission** is proposed to transform the sports sector over the next decade through talent pathways, coaching, sports science/tech integration, competitions, and infrastructure.
- Tourism initiatives include digitisation (National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid), guide upskilling, and development of heritage/cultural destinations.

5) Fiscal Position

- The Budget states total expenditure of **₹53.5 lakh crore**, net tax receipts of **₹28.7 lakh crore**, and a fiscal deficit target of **4.3% of GDP** for FY 2026–27, alongside net and gross market borrowings.
- The Press Information Bureau summary highlights **effective capex** (including grants-in-aid for asset creation) and the public capex thrust for FY 2026–27.

6) Women Initiatives

- **One girls' hostel in every district:** Through Viability Gap Funding/**capital support**, the Budget proposes setting up **1 girls' hostel in each district**, specifically to address constraints faced by girl students in **Higher Education STEM institutions**. **SHE Marts for women entrepreneurs (SHGs):** Building on the **Lakhpatti Didi Programme, Self-Help Entrepreneur (SHE) Marts** are proposed as **community-owned retail outlets** (via cluster level federations) supported through enhanced/innovative financing instruments.
- **Market linkages involving women-led groups (Fisheries):** Initiatives to strengthen the fisheries value chain include enabling market linkages involving **start-ups and women-led groups** along with producer organisations.
- **Care ecosystem + caregiver training:** The Budget proposes building a stronger **care ecosystem** (including geriatric and allied care) and training **1.5 lakh caregivers** in the coming year through NSQF-aligned programmes—an area where women often form a significant share of the workforce.

Part B (Tax Proposals)

A) Direct Taxes

- The **New Income Tax Act, 2025** is stated to **come into effect from 01 April 2026**, with simplified rules and forms to be notified.
- The Budget emphasises reducing multiplicity of proceedings to rationalise **penalty and prosecution**, and proposes a **single category of IT services** with a common safe-harbour margin, plus a higher threshold for safe harbour for IT services.
- In capital markets, **STT on futures** is proposed to be raised to **0.05% (from 0.02%)**, and changes are also proposed for options.
- Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) is proposed to be finalised at a specified rate, with associated transition provisions.

B) Indirect Taxes (Customs/Excise)

- **Energy transition and security** measures include extending customs duty exemptions to capital goods used for manufacturing **Lithium-ion cells** for battery energy storage systems and exemptions for inputs such as **sodium antimonate** used in solar glass.
- For **nuclear power**, the basic customs duty exemption on imports of goods required for nuclear power projects is proposed to be extended till **2035**, with expanded coverage.
- For **critical minerals**, basic customs duty exemption is proposed for import of capital goods required for processing critical minerals in India.
- For **public health**, basic customs duty is proposed to be exempted on **17 drugs/medicines**.
- For sustainability, the value of **biogas** is proposed to be excluded for calculating central excise duty payable on **biogas blended CNG**.