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## IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

### NATIONAL

#### Union Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman launches National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0

**In the News:** Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman launched the National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0 (NMP 2.0), developed by NITI Aayog, estimating an aggregate monetisation potential of ₹16.72 lakh crore over the five-year period from FY 2026 to FY 2030, aligned with India's Viksit Bharat vision.

#### Key Points:

- **About NMP 2.0:** NMP 2.0 is the second phase of the asset monetisation pipeline of Central ministries and public sector entities, developed by NITI Aayog in consultation with infrastructure line ministries. It is based on the mandate for 'Asset Monetisation Plan 2025–30' announced in Union Budget 2025–26. The total monetisation potential is estimated at ₹16.72 lakh crore, including private sector investment of ₹5.8 lakh crore, over FY 2026–2030 — more than 2.6 times higher than NMP 1.0's target.
- **NMP 1.0 Performance:** NMP 1.0 was launched in 2021 and covered the four-year period from FY 2021–22 to FY 2024–25 with a target of ₹6 lakh crore. Nearly 90% of this target was achieved. It helped attract institutional investors such as pension and sovereign wealth funds and led to the creation of Public InvITs, enabling citizens to directly participate in infrastructure development.
- **Top Sectors by Monetisation Value:** Highways, Multi-Modal Logistics Parks (MMLPs), and ropeways lead with ₹4.42 lakh crore (26%), followed by Power at ₹2.77 lakh crore (17%), Ports at ₹2.64 lakh crore (16%), Railways at ₹2.62 lakh crore (16%), and Coal at ₹2.16 lakh crore (13%). Other sectors include Mines, Urban Infrastructure, Civil Aviation, Petroleum & Natural Gas, Warehousing, Telecom, and Tourism.
- **Monetisation Instruments:** Assets will be monetised through a range of instruments including Public-Private Partnership (PPP) concessions, Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs), Toll-Operate-Transfer (TOT) models, securitisation of cash flows, divestment of portions of listed entities, and strategic commercial auctions.
- **Governance and Oversight:** An empowered Core Group of Secretaries on Asset Monetisation (CGAM), chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, will monitor the progress of the programme. The initiative involves multi-stakeholder consultations with infrastructure line ministries covering Roads, Railways, Power, Petroleum, Civil Aviation, Ports, Telecom, Tourism, Coal, Mining, and Urban Affairs.

#### India to Host Bharat Steel 2026 Summit in New Delhi from April 16

**In the News:** India will host the Bharat Steel 2026 summit in New Delhi from 16 April 2026 as a two-day policy–industry platform focused on the next-generation steel ecosystem.

#### Key Points:

- **Dates and Duration:** Bharat Steel 2026 is scheduled for 16–17 April 2026 as a two-day summit.
- **Venue:** The summit is planned at Bharat Mandapam (ITPO), Pragati Maidan, New Delhi.
- **Organising Framework:** The summit is organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Steel, Government of India, as a flagship annual event for the steel sector.
- **Participation Profile:** The summit will bring together leaders from steel, technology, mining, and trading companies along with policymakers and other key stakeholders.
- **Purpose and Focus:** The summit is positioned as a policy–business dialogue to shape the future of the steel sector and highlight India's steel ecosystem for global collaboration.
- **Agenda Themes:** The published programme highlights discussions on raw material security, trade, technology transfer, and greener and more sustainable steel production.

## For 2nd Consecutive Year Mangaluru Airport Wins 2025 ASQ Best Arrivals Award

**In the News:** Airports Council International (ACI) World named Mangaluru International Airport as the winner of the 2025 Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Award for “Best Airport at Arrivals – Globally,” marking its second consecutive win in the category.

### Key Points:

- Awarding Body and Category: ACI World conferred the 2025 ASQ Award for “Best Airport at Arrivals – Globally” on Mangaluru International Airport.
- Passenger-Feedback Basis: The ASQ Awards are based on independently collected, real-time passenger feedback through ACI’s Airport Service Quality survey programme.
- What Arrivals Measures: The arrivals category evaluates the inbound journey, including processes like immigration and baggage delivery, along with cleanliness, wayfinding, terminal ambience, and overall comfort.
- Second Consecutive Year: The airport also won the same global arrivals award for 2024, making 2025 its second straight recognition in this category.
- Global Selectivity: In 2025, only a small group of airports worldwide were selected for the “Best Airport at Arrivals – Globally” category.
- Award Presentation: The award is scheduled to be presented at the ASQ Awards Ceremony in Istanbul, Türkiye, on 2 September 2026 during the ACI World Airport Experience Summit.

## Oleum Gas Leak in Palghar Triggers Large-Scale Evacuation

**In the News:** On 2 March 2026, a hazardous oleum gas (fuming sulphuric acid) leak occurred at a chemical unit in Palghar district, Maharashtra, leading to a precautionary evacuation. Over 2,600 people, including about 1,600 students, were evacuated from the affected area. The incident was reported from the Boisar MIDC / Tarapur MIDC industrial area, and the gas impact was described as spreading across an approximately 5-km radius. On 5 March 2026, the NHRC took suo motu cognisance and issued a notice to the State Chief Secretary seeking a detailed report within two weeks.

### Key Pointers

- The leak occurred at a unit of Bhageria Industries Ltd in the Tarapur MIDC area at Boisar, and it produced a dense cloud of white fumes that spread rapidly due to wind conditions.
- The local administration stated that the leakage occurred from a 2,500-litre capacity oleum day tank, and the smoke spread to surrounding areas.
- The affected area was described as extending to an approximately 5-km radius, and residents within a 3–4 km zone reported symptoms such as eye irritation, coughing, and difficulty breathing.
- As a precautionary measure, the authorities evacuated about 1,600 students from Tarapur Vidyamandir and moved more than 1,000 workers from the unit and neighbouring firms to safety.
- Response teams included the NDRF, BARC, and the Fire Brigade, and officials noted that high smoke concentration initially made it difficult to reach the exact leak location.
- Officials stated that there was no life-threatening situation at the site and that around 90–95% of the spillage had been covered/contained.
- At least three people reported minor eye irritation, and the exact cause of the leakage was stated to be not yet determined at the time of reporting.

## Tamil Nadu Leads India in Deceased Organ Donation

**In the News:** Tamil Nadu recorded 57 deceased organ donors in the first two months of 2026, indicating a sharp rise in deceased donation activity. The State’s deceased donation programme is overseen by the Transplant Authority of Tamil

Nadu (TRANSTAN). TRANSTAN states that Tamil Nadu has won the Government of India's Best State Award in organ donation and transplantation for six consecutive years. Tamil Nadu's Health policy documentation also highlights recent steps such as Government honour for brain-dead donors and the roll-out of the 'Vidiyal' organ allocation platform.

### Key Pointers

- TRANSTAN is the State-level authority that coordinates organ donation and transplantation systems, including allocation processes and related governance in Tamil Nadu.
- Tamil Nadu recorded 57 deceased organ donations in January–February 2026, which averages close to one deceased donor per day over that period.
- TRANSTAN states that Tamil Nadu is the first State to streamline organ allocation and to clarify medico-legal procedures related to organ donation from brain-dead donors.
- Tamil Nadu's Health policy note states that the Hon'ble Chief Minister announced that all brain-dead persons who have donated organs shall receive Government honour, and the note links this to a surge in cadaver harvesting and organ donations.
- The same policy note states that Tamil Nadu has 13 Government Hospitals functioning as Transplant Organ Retrieval Centres (TORC) and licensed transplant hospitals, and 27 Government hospitals functioning as Non-Transplant Organ Retrieval Centres (NTORC).
- The policy note states that Tamil Nadu launched the 'Vidiyal' website and mobile application for organ registration and allocation, and it describes the platform as a transparency measure.
- TRANSTAN states that Tamil Nadu provides financial assistance for transplants to needy patients through the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Scheme up to ₹22 lakhs.
- TRANSTAN's statistics page states that Tamil Nadu "stands first" in maximising utilisation of organs and tissues per potential brain-dead donor, and it publishes annual utilisation percentages for major organs.
- TRANSTAN lists utilisation percentages for kidney, liver, heart, and lungs across years (for example, 2022 utilisation is shown as Kidney 91%, Liver 90%, Heart 44%, Lungs 29%).

### Kolli Hills Gets Tamil Nadu's First Dark Sky Park

**In the News:** The Government of Tamil Nadu launched the State's first Dark Sky Park at Ariyur Shola Reserve Forest, Kolli Hills, Namakkal district. The launch was done by the Hon'ble Minister for Forests, Thiru R. S. Rajakannappan, as per the official press release dated 27 February 2026. The official press release defines a Dark Sky Park as a designated landscape protected from artificial light pollution to enable clear observation of celestial bodies. The project had earlier been announced on the floor of the Legislative Assembly on 25 June 2024.

### Key Pointers

- The Dark Sky Park is located at Ariyur Shola Reserve Forest in Kolli Hills and was selected after assessing ecological suitability and sky visibility conditions.
- The official press release states that the Dark Sky Park was set up at a cost of ₹44 lakhs and includes three advanced telescopes and solar panels for on-site operations.
- The earlier Assembly announcement document states that a dark sky park would be set up at Kolli Hills, Namakkal at a cost of ₹1.00 crore.
- The press release states that the Centre will function during day time hours to promote scientific literacy and awareness on astronomy among students, researchers, and the public.
- The Forest Department will conduct structured stargazing sessions, and it will facilitate transport arrangements for visitors.

- The press release states that accommodation will be provided in due course, and options without overnight stay will also be available.
- Whole-night stargazing camps will be organised two to three times a month during significant astronomical events, particularly around the new moon phase for optimal visibility.
- The press release states that the initiative aims to promote responsible astro-tourism while keeping tourism development aligned with ecological safeguards and regulated visitor access.

### **Bihar Will Get New CM As Nitish Kumar To Go Rajya Sabha Will Resign Soon**

**In the News:** The Election Commission of India has announced biennial elections to fill 37 Rajya Sabha seats whose terms end in April 2026. The election schedule fixes polling on 16 March 2026 (9:00 AM–4:00 PM) and counting at 5:00 PM the same day. In this cycle, Bihar has five Rajya Sabha vacancies arising from members retiring on 9 April 2026. On 5 March 2026, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar filed his nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha election from Bihar at the Assembly office in Patna.

#### **Key Pointers**

- Rajya Sabha seats of a State are filled by indirect election: the elected MLAs of the State Legislative Assembly elect members using proportional representation by single transferable vote (STV).
- Voting in Rajya Sabha elections uses an open ballot: an MLA belonging to a political party must show the marked ballot to the party's authorised agent before putting it in the ballot box, as laid down in Rule 39AA.
- Apart from elected seats, 12 members are nominated by the President for special knowledge or practical experience in literature, science, art, and social service.
- The ECI schedule for these biennial elections is: notification—26 Feb 2026; last date for nominations—5 Mar 2026; scrutiny—6 Mar 2026; withdrawal—9 Mar 2026; poll—16 Mar 2026; counting—16 Mar 2026 at 5:00 PM; completion—by 20 Mar 2026.
- The five Bihar Rajya Sabha seats falling vacant on 9 April 2026 are linked to the retirement of Amarendra Dhari Singh, Prem Chand Gupta, Ramnath Thakur, Upendra Kushwaha, and Haribansh Narayan Singh.
- Nitish Kumar filed his nomination on 5 March 2026, which is also the last date for nominations in the ECI schedule.
- In Bihar, the Chief Minister is appointed by the Governor under Article 164, and the Council of Ministers holds office during the Governor's pleasure.

### **Vinai Kumar Saxena Appointed Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh & R. N. Ravi Appointed Governor of West Bengal**

**In the News:** On 5 March 2026, the President of India accepted the resignation of Dr. C. V. Ananda Bose as Governor of West Bengal. On the same date, Shri R. N. Ravi was appointed Governor of West Bengal. On the same date, Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh. The official communique stated that these appointments will take effect from the dates the appointees assume charge of their respective offices.

#### **Key Pointers**

- The President appointed Shri R. N. Ravi, who was serving as Governor of Tamil Nadu, as Governor of West Bengal.
- The President directed that Shri Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, who was serving as Governor of Kerala, will discharge the functions of Governor of Tamil Nadu.
- The President appointed Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena, who was serving as Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, as Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh.
- The President appointed Shri Taranjit Singh Sandhu as the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.
- The President appointed Shri Kavinder Gupta, who was serving as Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, as Governor of Himachal Pradesh.

- The same communique also included appointments of Shri Shiv Pratap Shukla as Governor of Telangana, Shri Jishnu Dev Varma as Governor of Maharashtra, Shri Nand Kishore Yadav as Governor of Nagaland, and Lt. General (Retired) Syed Ata Hasnain as Governor of Bihar.
- Under the Constitution, a Governor is appointed by the President by warrant under the President's hand and seal, and the Governor holds office during the pleasure of the President.
- Under the Constitution, every Union Territory is administered by the President through an administrator appointed by the President with such designation as the President specifies.

### IBM Launches First Infrastructure Innovation Centre in Bengaluru to Power India-Led AI Development

**In the News:** IBM launched its first Infrastructure Innovation Centre — named the Sangam Infrastructure Innovation Center — in Bengaluru, housed within its India Systems Development Lab (ISDL) campus. The centre is designed to accelerate enterprise-scale AI development, hybrid cloud innovation, and advanced infrastructure engineering, strengthening India's role as a strategic global hub in IBM's technology ecosystem.

#### Key Points:

- **Name of Centre:** Sangam Infrastructure Innovation Center — IBM's first Infrastructure Innovation Centre globally, launched on March 5, 2026.
- **Location:** Bengaluru, Karnataka; housed within IBM's new India Systems Development Lab (ISDL) campus.
- **Purpose:** A collaborative engineering hub designed to co-create AI solutions with clients, Independent Software Vendors (ISVs), Global System Integrators (GSIs), Global Capability Centers (GCCs), and ecosystem partners.
- **Focus areas:** Enterprise-scale AI development, hybrid cloud technologies, data architectures, automation, and advanced infrastructure engineering — covering the entire computing stack.
- **India Systems Development Lab (ISDL):** The largest development hub in IBM's global infrastructure business; focuses on mainframes, servers, storage systems, cloud technologies, and Technology Lifecycle Services (TLS).
- **IBM's India development labs:** Located in Bengaluru, Pune, and Hyderabad; engineers from these labs contribute to developing next-generation processors and operating systems for IBM's global enterprise infrastructure platforms.
- **IBM Institute for Business Value study findings:** 58% of Indian organisations have increased infrastructure investments due to rising AI demand; 19% projected growth in infrastructure budgets in 2025; 43% of organisations establishing or planning AI Centres of Excellence.
- **IBM's global reach:** IBM operates in more than 175 countries; thousands of government and corporate entities in critical sectors (financial services, telecom, healthcare) rely on IBM's hybrid cloud platform and Red Hat OpenShift.

### Home Minister Amit Shah Launches 'Pragati' and 'Vikas' Mascots for Census-2027

**In the News:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah soft-launched four digital tools and unveiled two mascots — 'Pragati' and 'Vikas' — for Census 2027 in New Delhi, marking a major step towards India's first fully digital census. The census, to be conducted in two phases in 2026 and 2027, is expected to be the world's largest enumeration exercise, involving over 3 million enumerators, supervisors, and officials across India. It is the 16<sup>th</sup> census of India costing Rs. 11,718 crore.

#### Key Points:

- **Event:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah soft-launched digital tools and unveiled mascots for Census 2027 in New Delhi.
- **First fully digital census:** Census 2027 will be India's first fully digital census, replacing the traditional paper-based process with advanced digital platforms.
- **Scale:** Expected to be the world's largest enumeration exercise, involving more than 3 million enumerators, supervisors, and officials across India.
- **Gazette notification:** The government formally initiated the census process through a Gazette notification issued on June 16, 2025.

- **Developed by:** Four digital platforms were developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to streamline operations and enhance field monitoring.
- **Mascots:** 'Pragati' (female enumerator) and 'Vikas' (male enumerator) were unveiled as the public faces of the census campaign, symbolising equal participation of women and men in building a Developed India by 2047. They will be used in public outreach and awareness campaigns.
- **Self-Enumeration (first-ever):** For the first time in India's census history, citizens can submit household details online via a secure web portal in 16 languages before the door-to-door survey. A unique Self-Enumeration ID will be generated and verified by enumerators during field visits.

### Indian Government Suspends TRP Ratings for TV News Channels

**In the News:** The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) directed the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) to immediately suspend the reporting of Television Rating Points (TRPs) for TV news channels for four weeks, or until further orders. The directive was issued amid concerns that certain news channels were airing sensational and speculative content about the ongoing Israel-Iran conflict, potentially causing panic among viewers with family or connections in conflict-affected regions.

#### Key Points:

- **The Directive:** The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) on March 7, 2026, ordered BARC to immediately withhold publishing TRP ratings for all news TV channels for four weeks or until further instructions, whichever is earlier.
- **Reason for Suspension:** The government observed that certain TV news channels were displaying 'unwarranted sensationalism and speculative content' about the ongoing Israel-Iran conflict in West Asia, which could create panic among viewers — especially those with friends and family residing in or near conflict zones.
- **Legal Basis — Clause 24.2:** The directive was issued by invoking Clause 24.2 of BARC's policy guidelines, which requires BARC to comply with any orders, regulations, guidelines, or directions issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from time to time.
- **About BARC:** The Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) is India's sole official body responsible for measuring and publishing television audience viewership data, including TRP ratings. It was established in 2010.
- **What are TRPs?** Television Rating Points (TRPs) measure the popularity and viewership of TV programmes and channels. They are used by broadcasters and advertisers to determine audience reach, engagement, and advertising revenue allocation.
- **Past Precedent — 2020:** This is not the first time TRP ratings for news channels have been suspended. In 2020, the I&B Ministry suspended TRP reporting for several weeks after a Mumbai Police investigation revealed allegations of TRP data manipulation by certain broadcasters. The suspension was aimed at restoring credibility and transparency in television audience measurement.

### Operation Sankalp Back in Focus as Indian Navy Stays Alert in West Asia

**In the News:** Operation Sankalp, the Indian Navy's ongoing maritime security mission in the Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz, has come back into sharp focus amid rising West Asia tensions following the US-Israeli military strikes on Iran. Indian Navy warships deployed under the operation have been placed on standby for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations. On March 1, 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting to assess the situation and its implications for India.

#### Key Points:

- **What is Operation Sankalp:** A maritime security initiative launched by the Indian Navy on June 19, 2019, to protect Indian commercial vessels and ensure safe navigation through strategic sea routes in the Gulf of Oman, Strait of Hormuz, and Gulf of Aden. The word 'Sankalp' means commitment in Sanskrit.

- **Why It Was Launched:** The operation was triggered by a series of attacks on commercial oil tankers and cargo ships in the Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz in 2019, which raised serious concerns about maritime security in the region.
- **Current Status:** Amid the 2026 West Asia conflict, two Indian Navy warships — a frigate and a destroyer — deployed under Operation Sankalp in the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman have been placed on standby for HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) operations if required.
- **INS Surat:** Apart from Operation Sankalp vessels, INS Surat is currently stationed in Bahrain as part of regional maritime security engagement, strengthening India's cooperation with partner nations in West Asia.
- **Energy Security Link:** Nearly 62% of India's oil imports come from the Persian Gulf region. Any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz or surrounding waters directly threatens India's energy supply and economic stability, making this mission strategically vital.
- **CCS Meeting — March 1, 2026:** PM Narendra Modi chaired a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting to review the West Asia conflict. Attendees included Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The committee assessed implications for India's strategic interests, economy, and the safety of the Indian diaspora in West Asia.
- **India's HADR Track Record:** India has a strong history of deploying naval assets for evacuation and humanitarian operations during regional emergencies across the Indian Ocean, demonstrating rapid response capability.

### India Submits 7th National Report to the CBD

**In the News:** India has submitted its 7th National Report (NR7) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), providing a comprehensive assessment of the country's progress toward 23 National Biodiversity Targets (NBTs) and 142 indicators aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). This is India's first full progress assessment since the KMGBF was adopted in 2022. However, only 2 of the 23 national biodiversity targets are currently on track for the 2030 deadline.

#### Key Points:

- **About the Report:** India's 7th National Report to the CBD is the country's first full progress assessment since the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) in 2022. It serves as a 'reality check' on India's commitment to halting biodiversity loss by 2030.
- **Prepared By:** The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), with inputs from 33 central ministries, the National Biodiversity Authority, Wildlife Institute of India, and technical support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the GEF-8 Umbrella Programme.
- **Framework Used:** Progress is tracked against 23 National Biodiversity Targets (NBTs) and 142 national indicators, compiled through a dedicated digital NR7 data portal, aligned with the KMGBF's global targets.
- **Overall Finding:** Only 2 of the 23 national biodiversity targets — NBT1 (biodiversity-inclusive land and sea-use planning) and NBT2 (ecosystem restoration) — are clearly on track. For the remaining 21 targets, the report describes policies and programmes but lacks clear quantitative projections for 2030.
- **NBT1 — Land & Sea Use Planning (On Track):** India's forest and tree cover stands at 25.17% of geographical area (827,357 sq km), increasing by 1,445.81 sq km between 2021 and 2023. Wetland inventories are complete, eco-sensitive zones notified, and the PARIVESH 2.0 portal has streamlined environmental clearances.
- **NBT2 — Ecosystem Restoration (On Track):** India has restored or placed under restoration 24.1 million hectares against its Bonn Challenge pledge of 26 million hectares. Forest carbon stock rose by ~81.5 million tonnes to 7,285.5 million tonnes. Mangrove cover has increased modestly and bamboo area expanded by 1,540 sq km.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Confirmed Dead After Major U.S.-Israel Strikes & Iran

**In the News:** Iranian state media confirmed that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, aged 86, was killed following major joint military strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran, marking a historic and destabilising moment in Middle Eastern geopolitics.

#### Key Points:

- **Death Confirmed:** Iranian state television and the state-run IRNA news agency confirmed the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei following Israeli and US strikes. US President Donald Trump had earlier announced the death on his Truth Social platform, stating that Khamenei was killed in the joint strikes. Iranian state TV declared a 40-day mourning period and seven public holidays in his honour.
- **Background on Khamenei:** Khamenei, born in 1939, served as Iran's Supreme Leader since 1989, succeeding Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. He held final authority over all major state policies and led both Iran's clerical establishment and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the two main centres of power in the Islamic Republic.
- **The Strikes:** The joint US-Israeli military strikes began early on Saturday, February 28, 2026. Khamenei was killed at his office during the assault. The US justified the attacks as necessary to disable Iran's nuclear capabilities. US President Trump warned of continued "heavy and pinpoint bombing" throughout the following week and beyond. Iranian media also confirmed that Khamenei's daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter were killed in the strikes.
- **Interim Leadership:** Following Khamenei's death, the Council of the Iranian President, the Head of the Judiciary, and one of the jurists of the Guardian Council are to temporarily assume the duties of leadership in Iran, according to IRNA.
- **Iran's Response:** Iran responded to the strikes with its own counterassault and warned of further retribution. Ali Larijani, Secretary of Iran's National Security Council, stated that Israel and America would "regret their actions" and vowed an "unforgettable lesson" for the attackers. Iranian state television stated that Khamenei's "path and mission will be pursued with greater vigour and zeal."

### Names Ayatollah Alireza Araf as Temporary Supreme Leader

**In the News:** Hours after the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was confirmed, Iran appointed Ayatollah Alireza Araf as the jurist member of a three-member interim Leadership Council to temporarily fulfill the duties of the Supreme Leader during the country's political and religious transition.

#### Key Points:

- **Appointment of Araf:** Ayatollah Alireza Araf, a 67-year-old senior Shia cleric and close associate of Khamenei, has been appointed as the jurist member of Iran's interim Leadership Council. He has additionally been tasked with temporarily fulfilling the Supreme Leader's role, as reported by the Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA). He was previously considered one of the likely contenders to permanently succeed Khamenei.
- **Three-Member Leadership Council:** The interim Leadership Council consists of three members — President Masoud Pezeshkian, Chief Justice Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei, and Ayatollah Araf as the jurist representative. This council will function until the Assembly of Experts formally elects a new Supreme Leader, ensuring continuity in governance during the transition period.
- **Profile of Alireza Araf:** Araf currently serves as Deputy Chairman of the Assembly of Experts and heads Iran's influential seminary system in Qom. He continues to be a member of the Guardian Council, the body responsible for vetting election candidates and reviewing legislation. While religiously influential, he is not widely regarded as a dominant political powerbroker or known for strong ties to the security establishment.

- **Powers of the Supreme Leader:** The Supreme Leader is the highest authority in Iran's theocratic system, serving as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and overseeing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The position holds final authority over foreign policy, the judiciary, state broadcasting, and Iran's broader "Axis of Resistance" strategy across West Asia, combining sweeping religious, political, and military control.
- **Process of Selecting a New Supreme Leader:** Under Iranian law, the Assembly of Experts — a body of 88 Shia clerics elected every eight years by popular vote — is constitutionally mandated to elect the new Supreme Leader "as soon as possible." Candidates for the Assembly are vetted by the Guardian Council. The Assembly also holds the power to remove a Supreme Leader, though this has never occurred in Iran's history.

### **Micron Opens Large Single-Floor Semiconductor Assembly Cleanroom in Gujarat**

**In the News:** Micron announced the opening of its semiconductor assembly and test facility in Sanand, Gujarat, with Phase 1 featuring more than 500,000 square feet of cleanroom space and the start of commercial production.

#### **Key Points:**

- **Location and Facility Type:** Micron inaugurated its semiconductor assembly and test facility in Sanand, Gujarat, focused on assembling and testing memory and storage products.
- **Cleanroom Scale:** Micron stated that once fully ramped, Phase 1 will have more than 500,000 sq ft of cleanroom space, making it one of the world's largest single-floor assembly and test cleanrooms.
- **Commercial Production Milestone:** Official updates described the inauguration as marking the commencement of commercial production at the Sanand facility.
- **Investment Size:** Micron stated that the project involves a combined investment of about \$2.75 billion by Micron and its government partners.
- **Early Output Signal:** Micron reported an initial shipment of made-in-India memory modules for laptops manufactured in India for the Indian market.
- **Scale-Up Outlook:** Micron indicated that the facility is expected to scale up production in stages as operations ramp up.

### **India, Canada Announce Strategic Energy Partnership, Revive CEPA Talks**

**In the News:** India and Canada announced a reset in bilateral economic engagement on 2 March 2026 by advancing a Strategic Energy Partnership and finalising the Terms of Reference to relaunch negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

#### **Key Points:**

- **Strategic Energy Partnership:** The two sides agreed to advance a Strategic Energy Partnership to strengthen energy security and deepen cooperation across priority energy areas.
- **Clean Energy and Critical Minerals:** Official outcomes highlighted cooperation across clean energy and critical minerals, including mechanisms for information exchange and investment opportunities.
- **Structured Energy Dialogue:** The two sides welcomed the re-launch of the Canada-India Ministerial Energy Dialogue and a joint action plan under the dialogue framework.
- **CEPA Restart:** India and Canada finalised the Terms of Reference to relaunch CEPA negotiations covering trade in goods and services and other agreed areas.
- **Trade Target:** Both sides reiterated an ambition to raise bilateral trade to around USD 50 billion by 2030.
- **Nuclear Energy Link:** Official and media reports also highlighted commercial arrangements related to uranium supply to support India's nuclear energy requirements.

### **Women Hold Only 64% of Men's Legal Rights: UN Women Warns**

**In the News:** The UN Secretary-General submitted a report for the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to be held in New York from 9-19 March 2026. The report states that, worldwide, women have 64% of the legal rights that men have, showing that discriminatory legal frameworks still persist. The report flags major legal gaps in areas

such as rape laws, child marriage, nationality, and equal pay, which directly affect women's access to justice and equality. These findings were highlighted in public discourse ahead of International Women's Day (8 March) and CSW70.

### Key Pointers

- The report states that women globally have 64% of the legal rights of men, reflecting continued discrimination in law.
- The report states that 54% of countries still lack consent-based legal definitions of rape.
- The report states that 72% of countries allow child marriage in all or some circumstances, and this disproportionately affects girls.
- The report states that more than 45 countries retain at least one gender-discriminatory nationality provision in their laws.
- The report states that 44% of countries do not have laws mandating equal remuneration for work of equal value, which contributes to gender pay gaps.
- The report states that women face greater barriers to justice than men in nearly 70% of the countries surveyed.
- The report states that data for SDG indicator 5.1.1 show no reporting country has closed legal gaps in the four assessed areas, and that 54% of countries have legal gaps in all four areas.
- The report notes progress such as domestic violence legislation in around 87% of countries, but it emphasises that implementation gaps and structural barriers still block justice outcomes for women and girls.

### India Overtakes US in Childhood Obesity With 20 Million Children

**In the News:** The World Obesity Atlas 2026 has highlighted India's rising childhood obesity burden and projected large increases by 2040. The Atlas places India second only to China in the total number of school-age children living with high BMI, which puts India ahead of the United States on this absolute-count measure. The Atlas projects that about 20 million Indian children could be living with obesity by 2040. The Atlas also notes that the global target to halt the rise in childhood obesity is off-track for many countries, including India.

### Key Pointers:

- In 2025, about 14.9 million Indian children aged 5–9 years and about 26.4 million adolescents aged 10–19 years were living with overweight or obesity.
- The Atlas states that India has about 41 million school-age children (5–19 years) living with high BMI, and about 14 million children living with obesity alone.
- The Atlas estimates that by 2040, around 20 million Indian children could be living with obesity.
- The Atlas estimates that by 2040, around 56 million Indian children could be living with overweight or obesity combined.
- The Atlas projects that childhood disease indicators linked to high BMI in India will rise between 2025 and 2040, including increases in hypertension, hyperglycaemia, high triglycerides, and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) among children aged 5–19 years.
- The Atlas notes that about 74% of Indian adolescents do not meet recommended physical activity levels.
- The Atlas reports that about 35.5% of school-age children receive school meals, and it reports sub-optimal breastfeeding among 32.6% of infants.

### Adani Group Partners UNESCO For World Engineering Day 2026

**In the News:** The Adani Group has been named an official partner for World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development (WED) 2026, which is delivered by the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO) under the auspices of UNESCO. World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development is observed annually on 4 March, after being proclaimed by UNESCO in 2019. The 2026 global celebration was held on 4 March 2026 in Jakarta, Indonesia, and it was co-organised

by WFEO and the Institution of Engineers Indonesia with UNESCO support. The 2026 theme is “Smart engineering for sustainable future through innovation and digitalization.”

### Key Pointers

- Adani’s release states that this is the first time an Indian organization has been chosen by WFEO for this official-partner role for WED.
- The partnership is linked, in Adani’s release, to the group’s clean-energy work and to the Khavda renewable energy project in Kutch, Gujarat.
- Adani’s release describes the Khavda project as the world’s largest renewable energy project, with a planned capacity of 30 GW by 2029.
- Adani’s release states that Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) has operationalised over 7 GW of renewable energy capacity at Khavda so far.
- Adani’s release states that the Khavda site spans about 538 sq km, and it adds that the project is being delivered with support from multiple Adani companies, including Adani Energy Solutions and Adani New Industries.
- Adani’s release states that the project will use technologies such as bifacial solar PV modules, single-axis tracker systems, and an operations platform with AI and ML integration, along with waterless robotic cleaning systems for solar modules.
- UNESCO describes WED as a day that recognises engineers’ role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and sustainable infrastructure, and it links WED 2026 discussions to global trends such as AI for engineering applications.

### Chile Eliminates Leprosy, First in Americas Verified by WHO

**In the News:** On 4 March 2026, the World Health Organization (WHO), together with PAHO, announced that Chile has been officially verified as having eliminated leprosy disease, making it the first country in the Americas to receive this verification. WHO stated that Chile is the second country globally to be verified for the elimination of leprosy disease, after Jordan. WHO noted that Chile has reported no locally acquired leprosy case for more than 30 years, with the last locally acquired case detected in 1993. The verification followed a review by an independent expert panel convened by PAHO and WHO in 2025 at the request of Chile’s Ministry of Health.

### Key Pointers

- WHO stated that Chile has not reported a locally acquired case of leprosy for more than 30 years, and it recorded the last locally acquired case as 1993.
- WHO stated that between 2012 and 2023, Chile reported 47 cases nationwide, and it stated that none of these cases were locally acquired.
- PAHO explained that elimination of leprosy is defined as zero new autochthonous cases for at least three consecutive years after having interrupted transmission for at least five years.
- WHO stated that leprosy remained a notifiable condition in Chile, supported by mandatory reporting, integrated surveillance, and continuous clinical readiness across the health system.
- WHO stated that Chile’s system uses primary care as the entry point for suspected cases with referral to specialised dermatology services for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up, and it links clinician training to WHO’s Towards zero leprosy strategy.
- WHO stated that leprosy is fully curable with multidrug therapy (MDT), and it emphasised that early detection prevents complications such as disability.
- WHO stated that leprosy persists in over 120 countries with more than 200,000 new cases annually worldwide, even though verified elimination has been achieved in some countries.

## Yellowstone's Rare Echinus Geyser Erupts Again After Six Years

**In the News:** Echinus Geyser, located in Norris Geyser Basin in Yellowstone National Park, resumed eruptive activity in February 2026 after a long quiet phase. The first eruption since December 2020 occurred on 7 February 2026, followed by additional eruptions in mid-February. From 16 February 2026, eruptions began occurring at a high frequency, typically every 2 to 5 hours, drawing attention because Echinus is the world's largest acidic geyser.

### Key Pointers

- Echinus Geyser is the world's largest acidic geyser and is situated in the Norris Geyser Basin of Yellowstone National Park.
- Echinus had a major active phase in 2017, during which eruptions occurred very consistently about every 2–3 hours from 18 October to 10 November 2017, and then the activity stopped abruptly.
- After the 2017 phase ended, Echinus produced only sporadic eruptions, including one in January 2018, one in January 2019, and two in December 2020.
- In early February 2026, the geyser first showed repeated surges (agitated water and increased outflow), and then returned to true eruptions.
- The first eruption after the long pause occurred on 7 February 2026, and further eruptions occurred on 9 February, 12 February, and 15 February 2026.
- Starting 16 February 2026, eruptions were observed every 2 to 5 hours, and each eruption typically lasted 2–3 minutes.
- The eruption jets reached about 6–10 metres (20–30 feet) in height during this renewed activity.
- After each eruption, the water level dropped significantly and generally took about one hour to return to normal levels.
- Echinus activity is tracked through a temperature monitoring system in its outflow channel, and eruptions are indicated by temperature spikes reaching about 70°C (158°F).
- Late February 2026 saw a pause in eruptions for a few days, and the geyser may have already started quietening again, consistent with its historically irregular behaviour.

## Scotland Legalises Water Cremation: First UK Nation to Approve Alkaline Hydrolysis

**In the News:** The Hydrolysis (Scotland) (No. 1) Regulations 2026 provide the legal framework for hydrolysis as a method of disposal of human remains in Scotland. These Regulations state that, subject to specified provisions, they come into force on 2 March 2026. Scotland became the first part of the United Kingdom to legalise “water cremations” (hydrolysis/alkaline hydrolysis) through Regulations approved by the Scottish Parliament.

### Key Pointers

- The Regulations are titled The Hydrolysis (Scotland) (No. 1) Regulations 2026 and they make provision regarding hydrolysis, described as a new form of disposal of human remains.
- The Regulations state that, subject to specified provisions, they come into force on 2 March 2026.
- The Regulations record that a draft instrument was laid before and approved by resolution of the Scottish Parliament, using powers under the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016.
- The Regulations define hydrolysis as disposal of human remains in a chamber using hot water and potassium hydroxide, with or without sodium hydroxide, and they also cover any grinding or other processing of solid remains after removal from the chamber.
- The Regulations apply provisions in Part 2 of the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 to hydrolysis, with modifications specified in the schedules.
- The Regulations include consequential changes so that hydrolysis is treated alongside burial/cremation in relevant legal contexts, including amendments referencing hydrolysis in other legislation.
- Scotland's approval of hydrolysis is described as the most significant reform to Scottish funeral law since traditional cremation was introduced in 1902, and it is presented as an environmentally friendly alternative to burial or flame cremation.

## Raisina Dialogue 2026: Global Leaders Gather in Delhi From 5th March

**In the News:** The 11th edition of the Raisina Dialogue is being held from 5–7 March 2026 in New Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurates the Dialogue on 5 March 2026, with Finland’s President Dr. Alexander Stubb joining the inaugural session as the Chief Guest and keynote speaker. The 2026 theme is “Saṃskāra – Assertion, Accommodation, Advancement”, and the Dialogue is organised by Observer Research Foundation in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs.

### Key Pointers

- Raisina Dialogue is India’s flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-economics, held annually in New Delhi since 2016.
- The 11th Raisina Dialogue is scheduled for 5–7 March 2026, making it a three-day programme.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurates the Dialogue on 5 March 2026.
- H.E. Dr. Alexander Stubb, President of the Republic of Finland, joins the inaugural session as the Chief Guest and delivers the keynote address.
- The Dialogue is organised by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).
- The 2026 theme is “Saṃskāra – Assertion, Accommodation, Advancement”.
- The programme is structured around six thematic pillars: Contested Frontiers, Repairing the Commons, White Whale: The Pursuit of Agenda 2030, The Eleventh Hour, Tomorrowland, and Trade in the Time of Tariffs.
- The Dialogue includes participation from 110 countries, including Ministers, former Heads of State/Government, Members of Parliament, Military Commanders, Captains of Industry, Technology Leaders, academics, journalists, think-tank experts, and youth.
- The official programme estimates around 2,700 in-person participants and notes that the proceedings are viewed widely on digital platforms.
- The MEA media advisory for Raisina Dialogue 2026 listed visiting dignitaries arriving in New Delhi around the event dates, including senior foreign affairs representatives from countries such as Bhutan, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka.

## US Torpedo Sinks Iranian Warship in Indian Ocean

**In the News:** On 4 March 2026, a U.S. submarine sank the Iranian warship IRIS Dena in the Indian Ocean off the southern coast of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Navy stated that it recovered 87 bodies and rescued 32 people after the sinking. U.S. briefings stated that the submarine used a Mark 48 (MK-48) heavyweight torpedo, and the Pentagon released strike footage. Multiple reports described the incident as the first time since World War II that a U.S. submarine sank another vessel using a torpedo.

### Key Pointers

- The Iranian vessel that sank was identified as the frigate IRIS Dena, and the incident occurred off Galle in southern Sri Lanka.
- The Sri Lankan Navy stated that the sinking occurred outside Sri Lanka’s territorial waters, and it conducted search-and-rescue and recovery operations.
- Sri Lankan authorities stated that 87 bodies were recovered and 32 survivors were rescued, and they also indicated that some survivors were injured and received treatment in Galle.
- Sri Lankan officials stated that the ship had about 180 crew members on board when it went down.

- U.S. defense briefings stated that the strike was carried out using a single MK-48 torpedo, as described by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in the Pentagon briefing cited by USNI News.
- The U.S. Department of Defense released periscope-style video that it said shows the torpedo strike on the warship. Associated Press reporting stated that the IRIS Dena had been in Visakhapatnam, India, and was sailing home after taking part in an Indian-hosted naval event/exhibition when it was struck.

### Deadly Cassava Virus Threatens Africa's Food Security: Scientists Warn of Rapid Spread

**In the News:** Scientists and public-health/environment reporting in early March 2026 highlighted Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) as a major and expanding threat to cassava-based food security in sub-Saharan Africa. A January 2026 research paper modelled the current and future suitable habitats of cassava and CBSD across Africa and quantified the current risk area for CBSD spread. The research estimated that 33.7% of Africa's land area (about 10.2 million km<sup>2</sup>) is currently at risk of CBSD spread, while 54.6% (about 16.2 million km<sup>2</sup>) is currently suitable for cassava production. The same reporting stressed that stronger clean-seed systems, better surveillance, and wider deployment of resistant/tolerant varieties are key to limiting further spread.

#### Key Pointers

- Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) damages cassava by causing necrosis (rot) in the roots, and this damage can lead to severe or total crop loss.
- The disease can remain difficult to detect early because farmers may only clearly see the most serious root damage at harvest, which delays response and increases losses.
- The January 2026 study used species distribution models and combined cassava occurrence data with CBSD occurrence data drawn from published literature to map current and future suitability.
- The study reported that about 54.6% of Africa (16.2 million km<sup>2</sup>) is currently suitable for cassava production and that about 33.7% (10.2 million km<sup>2</sup>) is currently at risk of CBSD spread.
- The study identified isothermality (Bio03) as the largest contributor to the modelled current distribution of cassava, and it identified cassava harvested area as the largest contributor to the modelled current distribution of CBSD outbreaks.
- The study projected shifts under CMIP6 climate scenarios for mid-century (2041–2060) and later (2061–2080) periods, using scenarios including SSP126 and SSP585.
- The research paper stated that CBSD was historically concentrated along the East African coast for decades, but outbreaks expanded from the early 2000s into other parts of East and Central Africa.
- The research paper explained that CBSD can enter cassava fields through infectious whiteflies and through the use of infected cuttings as planting material, with infected planting material being especially important for longer-distance spread.

### Conflict Zones in the US - Israel - Iran War

**In the News:** The United States and Israel launched coordinated strikes against Iran beginning March 1, 2026, hitting approximately 4,000 targets in the first four days — outpacing any recent US air campaign including the Gaza war (Oct 2023) and the anti-ISIS campaign (2014). Iranian retaliatory strikes have hit GCC states, US military bases, and Israeli cities, triggering a multi-front regional conflict involving Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias across critical maritime chokepoints including the Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

#### Key Points:

- **Scale of strikes:** Airwars (UK-based war monitor) reports US–Israel hit significantly more targets per day than any campaign in recent decades, including the Gaza war (Oct 2023) and the US-led anti-ISIS campaign (2014).

- **100-hour record:** In 100 hours, US–Israel declared hitting more targets in Iran than in the first six months of the US-led coalition's campaign against ISIS.
- **Iranian casualties:** At least 1,332 people killed across Iran according to Iranian state media; at least 6 US service members, 11 in Israel, and 3 in UAE killed from Iranian retaliatory strikes.
- **Trump's stance:** US President Donald Trump stated there will be 'no deal with Iran except unconditional surrender,' signalling intent to continue military operations.
- **Israeli escalation:** Israeli army chief Eyal Zamir announced plans to intensify attacks, focusing on undermining the Iranian regime and its military capabilities.
- **Iranian retaliation strategy:** Iran launched missile and drone strikes across the Middle East including GCC states; aims to spread the conflict regionally to raise the cost of war for the US and Israel.
- **GCC targeting:** Iran targeted airports, oil facilities, US embassies, and military installations in Gulf states to pressure the global economy and force international intervention.
- **Nuclear deterrence:** Iran has threatened to strike Israel's Dimona nuclear site if the US and Israel attempt regime change.

### Russian oil 'waiver' explained: How war in West Asia forced Trump's hand, giving India short-term relief

**In the News:** Amid the effective blockage of the Strait of Hormuz due to the US–Israel–Iran war, the United States issued a temporary 30-day waiver (March 2026) allowing Indian refiners to purchase Russian crude oil already stranded at sea. The move provides short-term energy relief to India — the world's third-largest oil importer — while also serving Trump's domestic goal of preventing a sustained spike in oil prices ahead of US midterm elections.

#### Key Points:

- **The Waiver:** The US Treasury Department issued a temporary 30-day waiver (March 2026) allowing Indian refiners to purchase Russian crude oil already sitting in tankers at sea, despite earlier pressure on India to halt Russian oil imports.
- **Why India needed it:** The Strait of Hormuz — through which India receives over 40% of its oil imports (~2.5–2.7 million barrels per day) — has been effectively blocked due to the US–Israel–Iran war, cutting off supplies from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait.
- **India's oil import dependence:** India is the world's third-largest oil importer with an import dependence of over 88%; the Hormuz blockage posed a severe threat to energy security.
- **Background: India had cut Russian oil imports:** In recent months, India had significantly reduced Russian oil imports as part of trade negotiations with the US; Washington made halting Russian oil imports a prerequisite for scrapping the 25% additional penal tariff on India. In February 2026, India imported only 1.1 million bpd of Russian crude — almost half of the 2025 peak of over 2 million bpd.
- **US–India interim trade deal:** In early February 2026, the US and India announced an interim trade agreement under which the 25% tariff linked to Russian oil purchases was scrapped. The US claimed India committed to halt Russian oil imports; New Delhi did not comment.
- **Why Trump issued the waiver:** The West Asia conflict forced Trump to reverse his position. Ensuring oil supply continuity is critical to prevent a sustained spike in international oil prices, which would raise domestic fuel prices in the US — a politically damaging outcome in a midterm election year.
- **Strait of Hormuz significance:** The Strait of Hormuz handles approximately one-fifth of global liquid petroleum consumption and global LNG trade — making it the most important oil transit chokepoint globally. It is a narrow waterway between Iran and Oman connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.

### Hurun Rich List 2026: India Becomes Third-Largest Hub for Billionaires

**In the News:** The Hurun Global Rich List 2026, released on March 5, 2026, reveals that India now has 308 billionaires, ranking third globally after China (1,110) and the United States (1,000). India added 57 new billionaires while 27 dropped off, resulting in a net gain of 24. Total wealth held by Indian billionaires rose 10% year-on-year. Mukesh Ambani retained his position as Asia's richest person with a net worth of US\$109 billion.

#### Key Points:

- **India's Global Rank:** India is now the third-largest hub for billionaires in the world with 308 billionaires, behind China (1,110) and the USA (1,000), adding a net 24 billionaires compared to last year.
- **New Entrants:** India added 57 new billionaires this year — more new entrants than any country outside China and the USA — spanning healthcare, auto components, energy, and financial services.
- **Total Wealth:** Indian billionaires collectively hold wealth worth ₹112.6 trillion, a 10% increase year-on-year. 199 billionaires saw their wealth increase while 109 recorded stagnant or declining wealth.
- **Mukesh Ambani — Asia's Richest:** Reliance Chairman Mukesh Ambani retained his title as India's and Asia's richest person with a net worth of US\$109bn (₹9.8 trillion), up 9% or US\$9bn.
- **Gautam Adani:** Remains India's second richest at US\$83bn (₹7.5 trillion), despite a 14% decline, impacted by a US federal indictment and a US Treasury investigation into alleged Iranian sanctions violations.
- **Roshni Nadar Malhotra:** Chairperson of HCL Technologies ranked third among India's richest with ₹3.2 trillion, and is the only woman in India's top 10. Overall, 23 Indian women billionaires collectively hold ₹9.8 trillion.
- **Top Wealth Gainer:** Cyrus Poonawalla of Serum Institute recorded the largest absolute wealth gain in India, up 43% to US\$33bn, backed by global vaccine demand and a new European manufacturing base in the Netherlands.

#### Balen Shah Set to Become Nepal's Prime Minister After Election

**In the News:** Nepal's 2026 parliamentary elections have produced a historic political shift. The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), led by 35-year-old rapper-turned-politician Balendra 'Balen' Shah, has emerged as the dominant force, with Shah defeating former Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli in his own constituency by 68,348 votes to 18,734. Shah is now set to become Nepal's next Prime Minister, in what is being seen as a generational change driven by the 2025 Gen Z protest movement.

#### Key Points:

- **Election Result:** The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won a commanding majority in Nepal's 2026 parliamentary elections, ending over two decades of dominance by traditional parties — the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (UML).
- **Balen Shah's Background:** Balendra 'Balen' Shah, 35, is a rapper, civil engineer, and social activist who first entered politics as an independent candidate, winning the Kathmandu mayoral election in 2022. He is known for his governance reforms, transparency, and strong youth connect.
- **Defeated Former PM:** Shah defeated sitting Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli in his own constituency with 68,348 votes vs Oli's 18,734 — a decisive personal mandate.
- **RSP's Rise:** The RSP was founded only three years ago, yet secured leads across 100+ constituencies out of 165 directly elected seats. Shah also leads in the proportional representation vote count, pointing to a possible landslide.
- **Background — 2025 Gen Z Protests:** The elections were triggered by violent youth-led protests in September 2025, sparked by the Oli government banning social media platforms. Protests escalated over class inequality and political nepotism ('nepo babies'). 77 people were killed, and police were found to have been ordered to use lethal force against unarmed protesters.
- **Shah's Role in Protests:** Shah publicly supported the protesters during the 2025 unrest and called Oli a 'terrorist who had betrayed his country,' cementing his image as a voice for the youth.

- **RSP's Election Manifesto:** The party pledged to create 1.2 million jobs, reduce forced migration, raise Nepal's per capita income from \$1,447 to \$3,000 within five years, more than double the GDP to \$100 billion, and provide universal healthcare insurance.
- **Nepal's Parliament Structure:** The House of Representatives has 275 seats — 165 elected through First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and 110 through Proportional Representation (PR). Final results are determined after both counts are complete.

### International Women's Day 2026: Date, Theme, Significance, Messages & Wishes

**In the News:** International Women's Day is observed every year on March 8. In 2026, the theme is 'Give To Gain,' emphasising mutual support, generosity, and collective progress as tools to forge gender equality. The day celebrates women's social, economic, cultural, and political achievements, while drawing attention to ongoing challenges such as gender inequality, workplace discrimination, violence against women, and reproductive rights.

#### Key Points:

- **Date:** International Women's Day is observed every year on March 8.
- **2026 Theme — 'Give To Gain':** The theme highlights the power of generosity and reciprocity. It encourages individuals, organisations, and communities to give through donations, knowledge sharing, mentoring, equal pay advocacy, education, training, visibility, and time — all to advance women and achieve gender equality.
- **Core Message:** 'Giving is not a subtraction, it's intentional multiplication. When women thrive, we all rise.' The theme promotes the idea that supporting women creates a wider ripple effect of social progress for everyone.
- **Give To Gain Pose:** Participants are encouraged to strike the 'Give To Gain' pose — cupped hands outstretched to signify giving and receiving — or place one hand on the heart and extend the other. The hashtag #GiveToGain is used to spread solidarity on social media.
- **IWD Giving Campaign:** IWD 2026 calls on event managers worldwide to incorporate women-focused fundraising into IWD events, including inviting nonprofit speakers, exhibiting displays, distributing resources, and supporting grassroots women's organisations globally.
- **History — Origins:** The earliest recorded Women's Day was held on February 28, 1909, organised by the Socialist Party of America in New York City.
- **Clara Zetkin's Role:** German socialist activist Clara Zetkin proposed the idea of an international Women's Day at the International Socialist Women's Conference. A global 'Working Women's Day' was approved, though no date was fixed initially.
- **First International Women's Day (1911):** Celebrated on March 19, 1911, in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, and Austria, with over one million people participating in rallies demanding women's rights and better working conditions.
- **March 8 Established:** By 1914, multiple countries began observing the day on March 8. In 1922, Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin officially declared March 8 as International Women's Day to honour women's contributions to the Russian Revolution.
- **UN Recognition:** The United Nations began celebrating International Women's Day in 1975, later encouraging all countries to observe it as a day dedicated to women's rights and international peace.

## SCIENCE AND TECH

### CHEOPS Discovers Rocky Exoplanet that Defines Conventional Formation Theories

**In the News:** A study published in the journal Science revealed that ESA's CHaracterising ExOPlanet Satellite (CHEOPS) has discovered a four-planet system around the red dwarf star LHS 1903, whose outermost planet is unexpectedly rocky — challenging conventional planet formation theories.

#### Key Points:

- **The Discovery:** Using ESA's CHEOPS satellite, an international team led by Dr. Thomas Wilson of the University of Warwick discovered a four-planet system around LHS 1903, a cool red M-dwarf star located 116.3 light-years away in the constellation of Lynx. The system's unusual planetary arrangement — rocky, gaseous, gaseous, and then rocky again — has been described as an "inside-out system," defying the standard pattern observed across the universe.

- **The Unusual Planetary Order:** In our Solar System and most known planetary systems, inner planets are rocky and outer planets are gaseous. In LHS 1903, the first planet (LHS 1903b) is rocky, the second (LHS 1903c) and third (LHS 1903d) are gaseous, but the fourth and outermost planet (LHS 1903e) is surprisingly rocky. Rocky planets are not expected to form in the outer regions of a planetary system, where gas giants typically develop in cooler, gas-rich environments.
- **Theories Ruled Out:** Scientists explored and subsequently ruled out two alternative explanations — that the outer rocky planet had its atmosphere blown away by a giant asteroid or comet impact, and that the planets had swapped orbital positions at some point during their evolution. Both scenarios were eliminated through simulations and orbital calculations.
- **Inside-Out Planet Formation:** The most compelling explanation put forward is "inside-out planet formation" — a theory proposed about a decade ago but never before supported by such strong observational evidence. Under this model, the four planets formed one after another from the innermost to the outermost, rather than all simultaneously from a protoplanetary disc. By the time the outermost planet formed, the system had likely run out of gas, resulting in a small rocky world forming in a gas-depleted environment.
- **About CHEOPS:** CHEOPS (CHAracterising ExOPlanet Satellite) is an ESA mission developed in partnership with Switzerland and a consortium of 11 ESA member states. Its primary purpose is to characterise known exoplanets and study how planets form and evolve. The spacecraft is operated from the Mission Operations Centre in Madrid, Spain.

### **VoicERA Launched on BHASHINI National Infrastructure at India AI Impact Summit 2026**

**In the News:** At the India AI Impact Summit 2026, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) launched VoicERA, an open-source, end-to-end Voice AI stack, on the BHASHINI National Language Infrastructure, marking a major milestone in India's Digital Public Infrastructure journey for multilingual voice technologies.

#### **Key Points:**

- **About VoicERA:** VoicERA is an open-source, modular, and interoperable Voice AI platform deployed on India's BHASHINI National Language Infrastructure. It was launched by the Digital India BHASHINI Division (DIBD) under the Digital India Corporation (DIC), led by Amitabh Nag, CEO of the Digital India BHASHINI Division, in collaboration with EkStep Foundation, Centre for Open Source Software (COSS), IIIT Bengaluru, and AI4Bharat.
- **Key Features:** VoicERA is cloud-deployable and on-premise ready, with an open architecture that avoids vendor lock-in and reduces duplication of effort. It enables secure and scalable deployment across government agencies, research institutions, and innovation ecosystems, allowing departments to quickly build and deploy voice-enabled digital services without rebuilding entire technology stacks from scratch.
- **Expansion of BHASHINI:** BHASHINI has previously served as India's population-scale language infrastructure focused on translation and language technologies. With VoicERA's integration, BHASHINI's capabilities now extend to real-time speech recognition, conversational AI, multilingual telephony, and voice-enabled citizen services at population scale across sectors such as agriculture advisories, education support, livelihood services, grievance redressal, and scheme discovery.
- **Voice as Digital Public Infrastructure:** Officials described VoicERA as a "digital public good for voice." The initiative positions voice as the most natural interface for citizens, particularly those who prefer regional languages over English-based digital interfaces. It aligns with India's broader DPI ecosystem alongside Aadhaar (identity), UPI (payments), and DigiLocker (document storage), with BHASHINI serving as the language and voice layer of this infrastructure.

### **Skyroot's Vikram-1: India's First Private Orbital Rocket**

**In the News:** Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace is preparing to launch Vikram-1, India's first private orbital rocket, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota. Founded in 2018 by former ISRO engineers Pawan Kumar Chandana

and Naga Bharath Daka, Skyroot successfully launched the sub-orbital Vikram-S in November 2022 and is now set for its orbital debut — a major milestone in India's commercial space sector.

#### Key Points:

- **Vikram-1:** India's first privately developed orbital rocket, named after Vikram Sarabhai — the father of India's space programme.
- **Specifications:** Seven-storey (75 feet tall) rocket with an all-carbon composite structure; payload capacity of ~300 kg to orbit, though the first mission may carry only ~150 kg.
- **Propulsion:** Three solid-propellant stages — Kalam-1200, Kalam-250, and Kalam-100— with an upper Orbit Adjustment Module (OAM) powered by a 3D-printed liquid engine called Raman-2.
- **Launch Site:** Initial launch from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota (ISRO); subsequent launches planned from Kulasekarapattinam.
- **Founders:** Pawan Kumar Chandana (35) and Naga Bharath Daka (36), both former ISRO engineers, founded Skyroot Aerospace in 2018.
- **Milestone:** Skyroot successfully launched Vikram-S (sub-orbital) in November 2022 on its very first attempt — a feat not achieved even by SpaceX on its maiden mission.
- **Infinity Campus:** Skyroot's production facility near Hyderabad Airport, designed to manufacture one Vikram-class rocket per month once fully operational.
- **Partnerships:** MoUs with French newspace operator Promethee (satellite constellation launch), German aggregator Exolaunch, and Indian startups Dhruva Space and Bellatrix Aerospace.

#### GPS Spoofing Threatens Civilian Flights Amid US–Iran Electronic Warfare

**In the News:** Escalating military tensions between the US and Iran have triggered widespread GPS spoofing incidents across the Persian Gulf and UAE airspace. Commercial aircraft navigation systems are being fed false satellite signals, causing cockpit displays to show incorrect aircraft positions — sometimes appearing to be in Iranian territory while actually flying in international corridors. Over 1,000 vessels and hundreds of flights have experienced navigation anomalies since early March.

#### Key Points:

- **GPS Spoofing Defined:** Unlike signal jamming (which blocks GPS), spoofing transmits fake satellite signals that aircraft computers accept as real, displaying a completely false location on cockpit screens.
- **Trigger:** Escalating US–Iran military tensions, intensified by Operation Epic Fury, have led to widespread use of electronic warfare tools that are bleeding into civilian airspace.
- **Recent Incidents:** Aircraft near the UAE border have had their navigation systems indicate they were flying over Iranian territory when they were actually in international air corridors.
- **Scale of Impact:** Over 1,000 maritime vessels and hundreds of commercial flights have experienced GPS anomalies since March 1.
- **Aviation Risk:** If pilots follow a spoofed signal, they may unknowingly enter restricted or militarised airspace, potentially triggering a lethal military response.
- **Iran's Cobra V8:** Iran has deployed the indigenous Cobra V8 electronic warfare system, capable of disrupting signals up to 250 km away. Designed against enemy missiles and drones, it does not discriminate between military and civilian signals.
- **Airline Response:** Several airlines have rerouted flights to avoid the affected region, increasing flight duration and fuel consumption.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Kuno National Park Records First Sighting of Endangered Forest Owllet

**In the News:** Reports from Madhya Pradesh noted that Kuno National Park recorded the Forest Owllet for the first time, adding an important biodiversity record in the landscape where cheetah conservation activities are ongoing.

#### Key Points:

- **Species and Status:** The Forest Owllet (also known as Blewitt's Owl) is listed as 'Endangered' and is considered a rare and highly restricted-distribution species.
- **First Authenticated Record in Kuno:** Officials described it as the first authenticated record of the Forest Owllet from Kuno National Park.
- **Sighting and Confirmation:** The bird was first spotted by a local tourism operator in the Parond beat area, and the identification was confirmed by a wildlife expert on-site based on key features.
- **Historical Context:** The Forest Owllet was described in 1872, was long considered extinct after 1884, and was rediscovered in India in 1997.
- **Significance for Conservation:** Officials linked the sighting to stronger habitat protection and broader ecosystem recovery indicators in the protected area.
- **Behavioural Note:** Reports noted that the Forest Owllet is comparatively more active during morning hours than many other owl species.

### India Welcomes 9 Cheetahs from Botswana to Kuno National Park

**In the News:** India received nine cheetahs from Botswana, which were released into quarantine enclosures at Kuno National Park, strengthening Project Cheetah's population base.

#### Key Points:

- **Batch Size and Composition:** The Botswana batch comprised nine cheetahs, including six females and three males.
- **Quarantine Protocol:** The animals were placed in quarantine enclosures for acclimatisation and health monitoring before any phased movement into the wider landscape.
- **Population Count:** Official updates stated that India's cheetah population under Project Cheetah reached 48, including 28 India-born cubs.
- **Operational Logistics:** Reports noted that the animals were transported via an Indian Air Force aircraft and then moved by helicopter for the final leg to reduce transit stress.
- **Project Context:** The transfer was described as part of India's long-term cheetah reintroduction and conservation programme under government-to-government cooperation.
- **Next Steps:** The animals are to undergo health checks and behavioural monitoring before further management decisions are taken in line with the project's protocols.

## IMPORTANT DAYS

### International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness 2026: Why March 5 Matters for Global Peace

**In the News:** The International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness is observed every year on 5 March. The UN General Assembly, through resolution A/RES/77/51 (2022), proclaimed 5 March as this International Day. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) marks the day through public-awareness and educational activities, including events and youth engagement programmes.

#### Key Pointers

- The UN General Assembly proclaimed 5 March as the International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness through A/RES/77/51.
- UNODA states that the International Day aims to promote better awareness and understanding of disarmament issues, with a special focus on young people.

- The UNODA programme for the week includes public-facing events (hybrid and in-person) linked to disarmament themes, including sessions hosted from 2–6 March 2026.
- UNODA's schedule includes youth-focused engagement, including interactions with students (for example, UNREC engagement with students in Togo and UNODA engagement with students from Hiroshima).
- The day is designed as a public-awareness observance, and UNODA explicitly frames it around education and wider participation by the public in disarmament-related understanding.

## SPORTS

### Indian Women's Cricket Team Nominated for 2026 Laureus World Team of the Year

#### In the News

- On 3 March 2026, the BCCI announced that the India Women's Cricket Team has been shortlisted for the Laureus World Team of the Year Award.
- The official Laureus nominees list includes "India Women's Cricket Team" as a Team of the Year 2026 nominee.
- The nomination is linked to the team's maiden ICC Women's Cricket World Cup triumph in 2025, as stated in the BCCI advisory and the Laureus nominee profile.
- The winners are scheduled to be announced at a gala ceremony on Monday, 20 April 2026, in Madrid, Spain.

#### Key Pointers

- The BCCI stated that the India Women's Cricket Team has been shortlisted for the Laureus World Team of the Year Award, which is part of the annual Laureus World Sports Awards.
- The BCCI stated that the Laureus awards were first held in 2000 and they recognise major sporting achievements of the year.
- The BCCI stated that the India Women's Cricket Team is on the Team of the Year shortlist alongside Paris Saint-Germain, McLaren Formula 1 Team, European Ryder Cup Team, England Women's Football Team, and Oklahoma City Thunder.
- The BCCI stated that the shortlists are determined by votes from more than 1,000 sports media representatives across over 70 countries.
- The BCCI stated that the Laureus World Sports Awards winners are voted on by the Laureus World Sports Academy.
- The Laureus nominee profile states that India co-hosted the Women's ODI World Cup with Sri Lanka and reached the knockouts after finishing fourth in the group stage.
- The Laureus nominee profile states that India chased down Australia's target of 338 in the semi-final with nine balls to spare, and it describes this as the highest successful run chase in women's ODI history.
- The Laureus nominee profile states that India won the final by 52 runs after bowling out South Africa, securing their first World Cup title.

### India Stuns England! Thriller at Wankhede Sends India to T20 World Cup 2026 Final

**In the News:** India defeated England by 7 runs in Semi-Final 2 of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 at Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, on 5 March 2026. India scored 253/7, and England finished on 246/7, making it a 499-run match, which the ICC described as the most runs in a men's T20 World Cup match. The win set up a final against New Zealand at Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad, scheduled for 8 March 2026.

#### Key Pointers

- India posted 253/7, with Sanju Samson scoring 89 off 42 balls and providing the main platform for the total.
- England's chase ended at 246/7, and England fell short of what would have been a record chase in a T20 World Cup semi-final.
- England were 68/3 inside the powerplay, with early wickets including Phil Salt, Jos Buttler, and Harry Brook falling inside the first six overs.
- Jacob Bethell kept England in contention with 105 off 48 balls, and the ICC noted he hit eight fours and seven sixes before being run out.
- The ICC recorded a key dismissal as a relay catch in which Axar Patel intercepted near the boundary and the catch was completed by Shivam Dube, ending the Bethell-Will Jacks partnership.
- The match was played at Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai, and India qualified for the title clash after winning by 7 runs.

- The final is scheduled on 8 March 2026 at Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad, as per ICC fixtures/schedule communication.

### **Finn Allen Creates History With Fastest T20 World Cup Century**

**In the News:** New Zealand reached the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 final after a nine-wicket semi-final win over South Africa. Finn Allen scored an unbeaten 100 off 33 balls, which the ICC described as the fastest century in Men's T20 World Cup history. The innings broke the previous Men's T20 World Cup fastest-century record of 47 balls (Chris Gayle, 2016).

#### **Key Pointers**

- Finn Allen brought up his hundred in 33 deliveries and finished 100\*, and the ICC listed this as the new benchmark for the fastest Men's T20 World Cup century.
- The ESPN match stats note that this century was made in the semi-final in Kolkata, and New Zealand won the match with 43 balls left.
- The ICC stated that New Zealand chased a target of 170 inside 13 overs, with Allen and Tim Seifert (58) forming the key opening partnership.
- The ICC recorded Allen's boundary count as 10 fours and 8 sixes, and described the innings as a record-book performance.
- ESPN's statistical recap states that Allen's hundred is also the fastest across all T20 World Cup matches (men or women), surpassing the previous best of 38 balls (Deandra Dottin, 2010).
- The ICC noted that the win took New Zealand into their first Men's T20 World Cup final since 2021.
- New Zealand will play the final in Ahmedabad on 8 March 2026, as per the ICC fixtures list.

