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IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

NATIONAL

India seeks to join IEA: Why its request for membership is not a straightforward process

In the News: At the recent annual ministerial meeting of the International Energy Agency (IEA) in Paris, IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol announced that "India's membership is in its final stages." IEA member governments unanimously agreed to move ahead on building deeper institutional ties with Brazil, Colombia and Vietnam India. However, India's full membership remains complex as it would require the IEA to amend its founding legal framework, which currently restricts membership to OECD countries.

Key Points:

- **About the IEA:** The International Energy Agency (IEA) is a Paris-based intergovernmental organisation created in 1974 as a response to the global oil crisis triggered by the Arab oil embargo during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. It was originally set up by 17 OECD countries to ensure stable oil supplies, prevent future supply disruptions, and manage dependence on imported oil. Over time, its mandate has expanded significantly to cover renewables, climate change, decarbonisation, energy transition, and critical minerals.
- **IEA's Emergency Mechanism:** A core feature of IEA membership is the mandatory requirement for every member country to maintain minimum strategic stocks of oil to neutralise supply disruptions. This emergency mechanism has been used several times, including during the 1991 Gulf War and following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.
- **Membership Structure:** IEA currently has 32 full members, all of which are OECD countries. At the recent ministerial meeting, Colombia (accession country) was inducted as the 33rd full member, having joined OECD in 2020. In 2015, IEA opened its doors for non-OECD countries to become associate members, who participate in policy discussions but do not hold decision-making rights. There are currently 13 associate members. India became an associate member in 2017.
- **Why India Wants Full Membership:** India seeks full membership primarily to gain decision-making rights within IEA, which plays an increasingly influential role in guiding global energy policies. IEA has evolved into a leading knowledge platform on energy transitions, climate change, and clean energy technologies, and hosts one of the most reliable and comprehensive global energy databases. India submitted its formal request for full membership in October 2023, and the matter has also figured in India's bilateral discussions with the United States.
- **Why India's Membership is Not Straightforward:** IEA's founding charter restricts membership exclusively to OECD member countries. Since India has no inclination to seek OECD membership, the IEA would need to either amend its eligibility criteria or make a special exception for India. Current deliberations suggest that an amendment to IEA's legal framework may be on the cards. Brazil, also a non-OECD member, has similarly sought full IEA membership, adding further momentum to the push for charter reform.
- **India-IEA Engagement:** IEA's engagement with India has increased significantly in recent years, with several India-focused reports and data publications. India also engaged IEA to produce a special report on its LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative, which revealed that widespread adoption of simple lifestyle changes could avoid up to 2 billion tonnes of global emissions by 2030.

Big Change at Rashtrapati Bhavan! Lutyens Statue to Be Replaced by C Rajagopalachari

In the News: President Droupadi Murmu unveiled the bust of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) at Rashtrapati Bhavan, replacing the existing bust of British architect Edwin Lutyens. The event was held as part of the Rajaji Utsav, celebrating Rajaji's life and legacy as part of India's ongoing decolonisation efforts

Key Points:

- **The Change:** The bust of Edwin Lutyens at the Grand Open Staircase near Ashok Mandap — opposite the statue of Mahatma Gandhi — has been replaced by the bust of C. Rajagopalachari. This is part of a broader initiative to shed colonial vestiges and embrace India's cultural heritage.
- **Significance of Placement:** Rajaji's bust is positioned opposite the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, reflecting their close bond of deep mutual trust and friendship. The replacement of Lutyens' bust is described as an important act of mental decolonisation.
- **Rajaji Utsav:** A cultural event at Rashtrapati Bhavan featuring a photo and book exhibition, a film on Rajaji's life, and cultural performances. The exhibition will be open to the public from February 24 to March 1, 2026 at Amrit Udyan.
- **About C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji):** Born on December 10, 1878, in Salem, Madras Province (now Tamil Nadu), he was the first and only Indian Governor-General of independent India. He led the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha (1930), mirroring Gandhi's Dandi March, and authored the C.R. Formula (1944) to resolve the constitutional deadlock between the INC and the Muslim League. He served as Governor of West Bengal, Union Home Minister, and Chief Minister of Madras State, and founded the Swatantra Party (1959), advocating for a free-market economy. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award (1958) for his Tamil retelling of the Ramayana, *Chakravarthi Thirumagan*, and was one of the first three recipients of the Bharat Ratna (1954), alongside Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and C.V. Raman.
- **About Edwin Lutyens:** A British architect who, alongside Sir Herbert Baker, designed Rashtrapati Bhavan, North Block, South Block, and India Gate in New Delhi. A part of New Delhi is called Lutyens' Delhi in recognition of his architectural legacy.

India Launches 'PRAHAAR': New National Counter-Terrorism Policy Sets Zero-Tolerance Framework

In the News: India unveiled its National Counter-Terrorism Policy & Strategy, titled 'PRAHAAR', establishing a comprehensive zero-tolerance framework against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The policy outlines a multi-agency, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to prevent, respond to, and recover from terrorist threats.

Key Points:

- **India's Stance on Terrorism:** India does not link terrorism to any specific religion, ethnicity, nationality, or civilization. It has consistently opposed terrorism unambiguously and unequivocally, standing firmly by the victims of terrorism with the principle that there can be no justification for violence.
- **What is PRAHAAR?** PRAHAAR is India's counter-terrorism strategy, with each letter representing a pillar — **P**revention of terror attacks; **R**esponses that are swift and proportionate; **A**ggregating internal capacities for a whole-of-government approach; **H**uman rights and Rule of Law-based processes; **A**ttenuating conditions enabling terrorism including radicalization; **A**ligning and shaping international counter-terrorism efforts; and **R**ecovery and resilience through a whole-of-society approach.
- **Threat Profile Identified:** India faces sponsored cross-border terrorism by Jihadi outfits, threats from global groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS through sleeper cells, drone-based infiltration especially in Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, misuse of social media, encrypted apps, dark web, and crypto wallets for funding and coordination, nexus between organized criminal networks and terrorist groups, and threats from CBRNED (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive, Digital) materials and cyber-attacks.
- **Prevention Mechanism:** India follows an Intelligence-Guided pro-active approach. The Multi Agency Centre (MAC) along with the Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI) under the Intelligence Bureau (IB) serve as nodal platforms for real-time intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism coordination.
- **Response Framework:** Local police are the first responders, supported by specialised State and Central anti-terror forces. The National Security Guard (NSG) under MHA is the nodal national Counter-Terror Force for major attacks. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducts CT investigations with high prosecution rates to deter future incidents.
- **Legal Framework:** The principal legislation is the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967, supplemented by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023, Prevention of Money Laundering Act

2002, and others. India is also a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

- **Countering Radicalization:** Intelligence agencies disrupt terrorist recruitment of Indian youth. Community leaders, moderate preachers, and NGOs are engaged to spread awareness. De-radicalization programs are undertaken, including in prisons. Government schemes address poverty and unemployment to prevent exploitation by extremist elements.

Operation Demolishment Targets Naxal Memorials

In the News: India's intensified campaign against Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) has entered a decisive new phase with the launch of Operation Demolishment, under which security forces have been dismantling memorials and monuments erected by Naxal operatives to glorify their leaders and propagate extremist ideology. A total of 203 such structures have been demolished across Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh so far, with 2026 witnessing an unprecedented surge in demolitions.

Key Points:

- **Operation Demolishment:** A targeted counterinsurgency initiative aimed at dismantling Naxal memorials and monuments used to commemorate slain cadres, organise gatherings, and recruit local youth — particularly in remote forested areas. It targets not just armed cadres but also the ideological and psychological foundations of Naxalism.
- **Scale of Demolitions — Chhattisgarh:** 0 structures in 2023, 8 in 2024, 11 in 2025, and 130 in 2026 — bringing the state total to 149 structures demolished.
- **Scale of Demolitions — Maharashtra:** 1 structure in 2023, 2 in 2024, 7 in 2025, and 45 in 2026 — bringing the state total to 55 structures demolished. Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis congratulated Gadchiroli police, calling it a victory of democracy over fear.
- **Combined Total: 203 memorials and monuments** demolished across both states, with the bulk occurring in 2026, signalling a sharp escalation in the anti-Naxal campaign.
- **Ideological & Psychological Impact:** Security agencies maintain that these memorials served as tools of ideological outreach — used to glorify slain Naxal cadres, hold commemorative events, and influence vulnerable youth. Dismantling them aims at eroding the psychological grip of extremist organisations and curbing their narrative-building and recruitment mechanisms.
- **Broader Counterinsurgency Strategy:** Operation Demolishment complements ongoing combing operations against active cadres and efforts to disrupt recruitment and support networks. Authorities have indicated that similar measures may be extended to other LWE-affected regions.
- **About Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in India:** Commonly associated with the Naxalite or Maoist insurgency, the "Red Corridor" refers to LWE-affected districts spread across central and eastern India. Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra are among the most severely affected states. Counterinsurgency strategy includes both security operations and developmental initiatives targeting poverty, unemployment, and governance deficits.

Nidhi Chhibber Takes Charge as NITI Aayog CEO After BVR Subrahmanyam's Term Ends

In the News: Senior IAS officer Nidhi Chhibber took additional charge as the Chief Executive Officer of NITI Aayog following the completion of BVR Subrahmanyam's extended three-year tenure on February 24, 2026. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) issued the order, appointing Chhibber on an interim basis till a regular incumbent is appointed.

Key Points:

- **Nidhi Chhibber – New NITI Aayog CEO:** Nidhi Chhibber has been assigned additional charge as CEO of NITI Aayog. She is a 1994-batch IAS officer of the Chhattisgarh cadre and currently serves as Director General of the Development

Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO) under NITI Aayog. She will hold the charge until a regular incumbent is appointed or until further orders.

- **Previous Role & Experience:** As DG of DMEO, Chhibber has been responsible for outcome-based monitoring and evaluation of flagship government programmes. She previously served as Chairperson of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), bringing expertise in education sector reforms and data-driven policy evaluation.
- **BVR Subrahmanyam's Tenure Ends:** BVR Subrahmanyam, a 1987-batch IAS officer (Retired) of the Chhattisgarh cadre, was appointed NITI Aayog CEO on February 20, 2023. His initial two-year term ending February 24, 2025, was extended by one year and finally concluded on February 24, 2026. During his tenure, he focused on policy coordination, reform implementation, and served earlier as Chief Secretary of J&K, Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, and had a stint at the World Bank.
- **About NITI Aayog:** NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) was established on January 1, 2015 by the Modi government, replacing the erstwhile Planning Commission. It serves as the Government of India's premier policy think tank, promoting cooperative federalism by involving state governments in economic policy-making. Prime Minister Narendra Modi serves as its Chairperson, with Suman K Bery as Vice Chairman.
- **Key Members of NITI Aayog:** Full-time members include Dr V K Saraswat, Dr V K Paul, Dr Rajiv Gauba, Ramesh Chand, and Arvind Virmani. The CEO heads the executive operations of the institution.

India–US Joint Special Forces Exercise 'Vajra Prahar' Begins in Himachal Pradesh
In the News: The 16th edition of the India–US Joint Special Forces Exercise 'Vajra Prahar' commenced on February 24, 2026, at the Special Forces Training School, Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh, and will continue till March 16, 2026. The exercise aims to enhance interoperability, jointness, and combined Special Forces capabilities, with a specific focus on mountainous terrain operations.

Key Points:
- **About Exercise Vajra Prahar:** A bilateral Special Forces exercise conducted alternately in India and the United States, aimed at promoting military cooperation through enhanced interoperability and mutual exchange of special operations tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).
- **16th Edition — Key Details:** Dates: February 24 to March 16, 2026. Venue: Special Forces Training School, Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh. The Indian Army contingent comprises 45 personnel from Special Forces units, while the US is represented by 12 personnel from the Green Berets of the US Special Forces.
- **Previous Edition:** The 15th edition was held in November 2024 at the Orchard Combat Training Centre, Idaho, USA.
- **Training Focus Areas:** The exercise covers intensive physical conditioning, joint mission planning, execution of tactical drills under simulated operational conditions, exchange of best practices in special operations, and building combined capabilities for Special Forces operations in mountainous terrain.
- **Concurrent Exercise — Dharma Guardian:** Simultaneously, the 7th edition of Exercise Dharma Guardian between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) is underway at Chaubattia, Uttarakhand (February 24 – March 9, 2026), with 120 personnel from each side. Together, both exercises underscore India's expanding defence engagements with key strategic partners.
- **Other Major India-US Joint Military Exercises:** Yudh Abhyas (Army), Malabar (Naval), and Cope India (Air Force).

Union Cabinet Approves Proposal to Rename Kerala as "Keralam"
In the News: The Union Cabinet on February 24, 2026, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the proposal to rename the state of Kerala as "Keralam" — the name used in the Malayalam language. The decision was taken at the Cabinet's first meeting held at Seva Teerth, the new complex housing the Prime Minister's Office. The Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026 will now be referred by the President to the Kerala Legislative Assembly for its views, as mandated under Article 3 of the Constitution.

Key Points:

- **The Demand:** The Kerala Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution on June 24, 2024, urging the Centre to amend the First Schedule of the Constitution to change the state's name from Kerala to Keralam. The resolution noted that while the state is referred to as Keralam in Malayalam, its constitutional name remains Kerala. CM Pinarayi Vijayan had moved two such resolutions — in 2023 and 2024 — but neither received the Centre's green signal until now.
- **Why Was a Second Resolution Needed?** The 2023 resolution had sought changes not only in the First Schedule but also across all languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. However, upon examination, the required correction was found to have been effected only in the First Schedule. A fresh resolution was therefore passed in 2024 to address this discrepancy.
- **Role of Article 3:** Under Article 3 of the Constitution, Parliament may by law alter the name of any existing state. The proviso to Article 3 mandates that no such Bill can be introduced in Parliament except on the recommendation of the President, and the Bill must first be referred by the President to the concerned State Legislature for expressing its views within a specified period.
- **Current Stage of the Process:** Following Cabinet approval, the President will refer the Kerala (Alteration of Name) Bill, 2026 to the Kerala Legislative Assembly for its views. Once received, the Union government will obtain the President's recommendation to introduce the Bill in Parliament. If passed, it will formally amend the First Schedule of the Constitution to replace "Kerala" with "Keralam."
- **Origin of the Name "Kerala":** The earliest epigraphic reference is found in Rock Edict II of Ashoka (257 BCE), which mentions "Keralaputra" — interpreted as a reference to the Chera dynasty. German scholar Herman Gundert (compiler of the first Malayalam-English dictionary) traced Keralam to Cheram, describing it as the region between Gokarnam and Kanyakumari. The root "cher" means "to join", appearing in the compound "Cheralam", with "alam" meaning land or region.
- **Historical Background — Aikya Kerala Movement:** The Aikya (Unified) Kerala movement of the 1920s demanded a separate state integrating Malabar, Kochi, and Travancore. On July 1, 1949, Travancore and Kochi merged to form Travancore-Cochin state. The State Reorganisation Commission (headed by Syed Fazl Ali) recommended the creation of Kerala by including Malabar district and Kasargod taluk. Kerala was formally created on November 1, 1956 — observed as Kerala Piravi (Kerala Formation Day) — when states were reorganised on linguistic lines.

Dharma Guardian Exercise

In the News: The 7th edition of the annual Joint Military Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' between the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) commenced on February 24, 2026, at the Foreign Training Node, Chaubattia, Uttarakhand. The exercise will continue till March 9, 2026.

Key Points:

- **About Exercise Dharma Guardian:** An annual bilateral military exercise between the Indian Army and the JGSDF, held alternately in India and Japan. It is a key pillar of India-Japan defence cooperation, anchored in the employment of modern technology, enhancing interoperability, and contemporary operational aspects.
- **7th Edition — Key Details:** Dates: February 24 to March 9, 2026. Venue: Foreign Training Node, Chaubattia, Uttarakhand. Each side has deployed a 120-member contingent — the JGSDF is represented by troops from the 32nd Infantry Regiment and the Indian Army contingent is drawn from the Ladakh Scouts.
- **Aim of the Exercise:** To strengthen military collaboration, enhance interoperability, improve combined operational capabilities, and conduct joint operations in semi-urban environments. The drill focuses on modern military technologies, joint planning, and synchronised tactical operations.
- **Key Tactical Activities:** Troops will undertake establishment of a Temporary Operating Base, development of an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) grid, setting up Mobile Vehicle Check Posts, Cordon and Search Operations in hostile environments, Heliborne Operations, and House Intervention Drills.

- **Other India-Japan Military Exercises:** JIMEX (Japan-India Maritime Exercise), Veer Guardian (air exercise), Shinyuu Maitri (air exercise), Sahyog Kaijin (coast guard exercise), and Malabar (involving India, Japan, Australia, and the United States).

India Launches Zero Prize, Paying Big for Tangible Pollution Reduction

In the News: India announced its first-ever results-based environmental award, the Zero Prize, in New Delhi. Carrying a total corpus of Rs 5 crore, the prize rewards verified and measurable reductions in air, water, and land pollution, marking a major shift toward measurable climate accountability in India.

Key Points:
- **About the Zero Prize:** It is India's first national-level, performance-linked environmental award, convened by the School of Policy and Governance (SPG) and supported through philanthropic funding, corporate CSR partnerships, and institutional stakeholders. Unlike conventional recognition platforms, it links financial rewards directly to independently verified environmental outcomes.
- **Prize Distribution:** The total corpus of Rs 5 crore will award Rs 1 crore each across three categories — Air Pollution Reduction, Water Pollution Reduction, and Land Pollution Reduction. Each shortlisted project must establish a documented baseline and demonstrate measurable reduction over a 12-month challenge period.
- **Measurement Framework:** For air pollution, particulate matter exposure is assessed through fixed-location monitoring systems adjusted for meteorological variations. For water pollution, parameters such as BOD, COD, and nutrient loads are measured at discharge points following CPCB-aligned protocols. For land pollution, reduction in waste leakage is verified through traceable weight-based audits and documented third-party verification.
- **Eligibility:** The prize is open to start-ups, NGOs, corporates, municipal bodies, research institutions, and individual innovators implementing real-world pilot projects in defined urban or peri-urban areas. Early-stage ideas without measurable execution will not qualify.
- **Alignment with National Missions:** The Zero Prize aligns with the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), National Mission for Clean Ganga, and Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, acting as a bridge between policy intent and on-ground impact.

PM Modi Becomes First Indian Leader to Receive Israel's Top Parliamentary Honour

In the News: During his two-day state visit to Israel, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred with the 'Speaker of the Knesset Medal' — the highest honour of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) — by Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana. PM Modi is the first world leader ever to receive this medal.

Key Points:
- **About the Medal:** The Speaker of the Knesset Medal is the highest honour of Israel's Parliament. It was conferred on PM Modi in recognition of his exceptional contribution — through personal leadership — to strengthening strategic relations between India and Israel. PM Modi accepted it "with humility and gratitude", stating that the honour reflects the enduring friendship and shared values between the two nations.
- **First Indian PM to Address the Knesset:** PM Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to address the Israeli Parliament, receiving a standing ovation and 'Modi, Modi' chants from Israeli legislators. In his address, he highlighted the ancient civilisational ties between India and Israel, condemned the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack as "barbaric", and backed the Gaza peace initiative for durable regional peace.
- **Rare Dual Honour — Israel and Palestine:** PM Modi is among a rare group of world leaders to have received top state honours from both Israel and Palestine. In 2018, during his first official visit to Palestine, he was conferred the Grand Collar of the State of Palestine — the highest Palestinian honour for foreign dignitaries — by President Mahmoud Abbas.

- **India-Israel Relations:** The current visit is PM Modi's second to Israel, his first being in July 2017 when the bilateral relationship was elevated to a Strategic Partnership. During this visit, he also held talks with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, reviewing bilateral relations and discussing cooperation in water management, agriculture, and technology.

Punjab & Haryana HC Discharges Hooda and AJL in Panchkula Land Allotment Case

In the News: The Punjab and Haryana High Court discharged former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and Associated Journals Ltd (AJL) — publisher of the National Herald newspaper — in a corruption and cheating case related to the allotment of a plot in Panchkula. Justice Tribhuvan Dahiya set aside the April 2021 order of a special CBI judge that had framed charges against them, terming the continuation of prosecution an "abuse of the process of Court."

Key Points:

- **Background of the Case:** In 1982, HUDA (Haryana Urban Development Authority) allotted a 3,500 sq. meter plot in Sector 6, Panchkula to AJL for publishing a Hindi daily, Nav Jiwan. AJL failed to complete construction within the stipulated period, leading HUDA to resume (take back) the plot in 1992. AJL's subsequent appeals were dismissed in 1995 and 1996. In 2005, after the Congress returned to power with Hooda as CM, the plot was re-allotted to AJL at the original 1982 rate plus interest, rather than prevailing 2005 market rates.
- **CBI's Case:** The CBI registered an FIR in April 2017, alleging the re-allotment caused a wrongful loss of Rs 63 lakh to the state exchequer and a corresponding wrongful gain to AJL. Hooda and AJL were charged with criminal conspiracy and cheating under the IPC and criminal misconduct by a public servant under the Prevention of Corruption Act.
- **Why the High Court Discharged Them:** The court found the CBI failed to prove any actual loss to HUDA — an essential element of cheating or corruption charges. It noted that an audit objection raised in 2007 claiming a Rs 63.08 lakh loss was formally dropped by the Accountant General (Audit) in 2009, after HUDA explained the re-allotment was done in public interest. Since AJL paid the demanded price with interest, the court held that claiming any loss was "fictional."
- **Collective Decision, Not Individual Misconduct:** The High Court noted that while Hooda passed the initial order in 2005, the decision was unanimously ratified by the entire HUDA board in May 2006. The court criticised the CBI for singling out Hooda while ignoring other members who approved the decision, stating this "raises doubts about the CBI's bona fides."
- **Validity of Re-Allotment:** The High Court pointed out that the 2005 re-allotment order was never challenged or declared illegal by any civil court — AJL paid the money, constructed the building, and received an occupation certificate in 2014. The court found it "unfathomable" that the CBI could consider the re-allotment unlawful on its own and register a criminal case on that basis.

Pakyong Airport to Be Renamed After Freedom Fighter Trilochan Pokhrel

In the News: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang announced that Pakyong Airport — the only airport in Sikkim — will be renamed Trilochan Pokhrel Airport, honouring the state's first freedom activist, popularly known as "Gandhi Pokhrel." The announcement was made during the 31st Foundation Day celebration of the Akhil Sikkim Khas Chettri Bahun Kalyan Sangh at Rangpo.

Key Points:

- **Who Was Trilochan Pokhrel?** Known as "Gandhi Pokhrel," he is considered Sikkim's first independence activist, belonging to the Khas, Chettri, Bahun community. He actively participated in three major Gandhian movements — the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34), and the Quit India Movement (1942).
- **About Pakyong Airport:** Located approximately 30 km from Gangtok, it is the only airport in Sikkim. It was inaugurated by PM Narendra Modi on September 24, 2018, as a strategic project to boost connectivity in the Himalayan region, improving tourism, trade, and regional accessibility.

- **Significance of Renaming:** The renaming symbolises recognition of Sikkim's contribution to India's independence movement and honours a leader who represented courage, unity, and national pride. It also reflects Sikkim's commitment to preserving its historical legacy and celebrating local heroes.
- **Announcement Platform:** CM Tamang made the announcement at the 31st Foundation Day of the Akhil Sikkim Khas Chettri Bahun Kalyan Sangh — an organisation recognised for preserving cultural heritage, promoting unity, and strengthening social harmony in Sikkim.
- **Sikkim's Historical Context:** Sikkim became the 22nd state of India in 1975 after a referendum. Despite being a small Himalayan state, freedom fighters like Trilochan Pokhrel helped connect Sikkim's people to the broader Indian independence movement, making this recognition historically significant.
- **Other Highlights:** MP Raju Bista (Darjeeling) noted that 12 communities in Sikkim and 11 in West Bengal are yet to receive Scheduled Tribe recognition, and the matter is in its "final stages" with the Centre. Social worker Kipu Tshering Lepcha was conferred with the Sikkim Gaurav Samman award during the event.

Kejriwal, Sisodia were acquitted in the CBI case. Now what happens to the ED case?

In the News: A Delhi Special Court discharged AAP chief and former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, former Deputy CM Manish Sisodia and 21 others in the CBI's Delhi Liquor Policy Scam case. The 598-page order called the CBI probe a "pre-meditated and choreographed exercise" and raised questions about the fate of the linked ED money laundering case

Key Points:

- **Court's Verdict:** Special Judge Jitendra Singh of Rouse Avenue Court discharged all 23 accused, observing that the case relied on hearsay evidence, had major procedural lapses, and violated constitutional principles. The court also ordered a departmental inquiry against the "erring investigating officer" for framing charges without material evidence.
- **Background of the Case:** The case originated from a complaint by Lieutenant Governor V.K. Saxena alleging irregularities in Delhi's 2020 Excise Policy — including undue favours to licence holders, waiving of fees, and diversion of illegal gains. The CBI filed the initial FIR, and the ED later booked the accused on money laundering charges.
- **CBI's Next Step:** CBI has announced it will immediately appeal the judgment in the High Court, stating several aspects of its investigation were ignored or inadequately considered.
- **Impact on ED Case — The Legal Principle:** Under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, an ED case must be anchored to a predicate (underlying) offence. While ED can begin inquiry even before conviction in the predicate case, it cannot sustain its case once the accused is discharged or acquitted.
- **Landmark Ruling — Vijay Madanlal Chaudhary v. Union of India (2022):** The Supreme Court held that ED cannot prosecute anyone on the assumption that a scheduled offence was committed. It also stated that "if the person is finally discharged/acquitted of the scheduled offence… there can be no offence of money-laundering against him."
- **What Happens to the ED Case:** Unless the trial court's discharge order is stayed by the High Court (which is uncommon), the ED money laundering case against Kejriwal, Sisodia, and others cannot legally continue, as the predicate offence — the CBI case — has collapsed.

Exercise Vayu Shakti 2026: Indian Air Force Unleashes Firepower Near Pakistan Border

In the News: The Indian Air Force conducted Exercise Vayu Shakti 2026 at the Pokhran Field Firing Range in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, showcasing its advanced combat capabilities through live firepower demonstrations witnessed by President Droupadi Murmu, Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh, and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh.

Key Points:

- **About the Exercise:** Vayu Shakti is a triennial firepower exercise of the Indian Air Force, conducted at the Chandan Field Firing Range near Pokhran, Jaisalmer — close to the Pakistan border. The 2026 edition was held on 27 February

with the primary objective of demonstrating swift and precise strike capabilities in simulated wartime scenarios, covering both day and night combat operations.

- **Aircraft and Platforms:** Advanced fighter jets including Rafale, Sukhoi Su-30MKI, HAL Tejas, and Mirage 2000 carried out precision strikes using air-to-ground guided bombs and missiles, targeting simulated enemy bunkers, runways, and command centres. Boeing Apache and Chinook helicopters conducted low-altitude rocket and gun firing drills, casualty evacuation, and equipment transportation to difficult battlefield terrains.
- **Operational Capabilities Demonstrated:** The exercise showcased integrated wartime operations including Defensive Counter Air, Offensive Counter Air, Counter Air Strike, and Suppression of Enemy Air Defences. AWACS aircraft served as airborne war rooms for real-time battle management, while transport aircraft like the C-17 Globemaster simulated rapid troop insertions. Garud special forces integrated ground-air synergy.
- **Advanced Weapon Systems:** Rafale jets demonstrated long-range strike capability with SCALP cruise missiles and Hammer precision bombs. Su-30MKIs operated with BrahMos and Astra missiles in air superiority roles. Tejas highlighted indigenous agility in close air support, while beyond-visual-range missiles and anti-radiation weapons were also demonstrated.
- **Gender Integration:** In a landmark development, women officers and pilots participated for the first time, flying light and medium fighter jets, coordinating airborne surveillance, and handling mission-critical tasks — signalling the IAF's commitment to gender inclusivity without compromising operational readiness.
- **International Participation:** Guests from around 40 countries, including Quad nations, European, and Middle Eastern delegations, witnessed the exercise. The event served dual purposes — warfighting validation and strategic defence diplomacy, with potential to boost exports of platforms like Tejas and BrahMos.

Mount Abu Renamed Aburaj! Rajasthan Changes 3 Historic City Names

In the News: Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma announced in the Rajasthan Assembly the renaming of three cities — Mount Abu as Aburaj, Kaman as Kamvan, and Jahazpur as Yagyapur — as part of a broader initiative to restore the historical and cultural identities of these places.

Key Points:
- **Renaming Announcement:** Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma announced the renaming of three cities in the Rajasthan Assembly on February 27, 2026. The BJP-led state government stated that the changes aim to honour local sentiments and revive the historical and cultural identity of the respective cities. Official records, government documents, and signage will be updated to reflect the new names.
- **New Names:** Mount Abu has been renamed Aburaj, Kaman has been renamed Kamvan, and Jahazpur has been renamed Yagyapur.
- **Reason for Renaming:** The government stated that these historical names carry religious, mythological, and cultural significance deeply rooted in local traditions. The renaming aligns with similar exercises seen in other Indian states, aiming to reconnect places with their historical roots and strengthen regional pride and identity.
- **Additional Announcements:** Alongside the renaming, CM Sharma announced welfare measures including annual cost-of-living adjustments for legislators, mobile phones and tablets, and a dedicated housing scheme under the Vidhayak Awas Yojana. For senior journalists above 60, pensions were increased to ₹18,000, with widows receiving ₹9,000, along with a housing scheme through Awasan Mandal.
- **Gau Seva Policy 2026:** The Chief Minister also announced the launch of the Gau Seva Policy 2026, aimed at strengthening cow protection and welfare programmes across Rajasthan.

INTERNATIONAL

Global economic impact of U.S. SC invalidating Trump tariffs

In the News: The United States Supreme Court in a landmark 6-3 ruling struck down President Donald Trump's sweeping "Liberation Day" tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977, finding that the President had overstepped his constitutional authority. The ruling sent shockwaves through global trade, opening the door to potentially billions of dollars in tariff refunds while simultaneously injecting fresh uncertainty into the international trade landscape.

Key Points:
- **The Supreme Court Ruling:** The Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that Trump lacked authority under the IEEPA to impose sweeping global tariffs. Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the majority, held that Congress had not explicitly delegated tariff powers under IEEPA and that when Congress delegates such powers, it does so in explicit terms with strict limits. The ruling was joined by the three liberal justices and two Trump-nominated justices — Amy Coney Barrett and Neil Gorsuch. Justices Clarence Thomas, Brett Kavanaugh, and Samuel Alito dissented.
- **Background — Liberation Day Tariffs:** The tariffs struck down were announced on April 2, 2025, imposing a baseline 10% rate on all trading partners and country-specific "reciprocal" tariffs. The US had already collected at least $130 billion in tariffs under IEEPA before the ruling. As per the Final Monthly Treasury Statement for Fiscal Year 2025, the US raised $195 billion in total customs duties — more than twice the previous fiscal year — with a large share reflecting the post-April 2025 measures now invalidated.
- **Trump's Response — Section 122 Tariffs:** Hours after the ruling, Trump announced a replacement 10% global tariff under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, which he subsequently raised to 15% on February 21, 2026. The new tariffs took effect on February 24, 2026. Unlike IEEPA tariffs, Section 122 authority is explicitly temporary — capped at 15% and valid for only 150 days, after which Congressional approval is required for continuation. With mid-term elections approaching and inflation concerns persisting, Congressional approval may prove difficult to secure.
- **The Refund Question:** Tariff collections between April 2, 2025 and February 20, 2026 may be subject to protest and refund claims. However, under US customs law, refunds are not automatic and hinge on the technical concept of "liquidation of an entry" — the formal administrative act by which Customs finalises the duty owed on a specific shipment. Once liquidated, the importer has 180 days to file a protest; if denied, the importer may sue before the US Court of International Trade. Trump indicated refunds would not come without lengthy legal battles, and dissenting justices warned the process would create an administrative "mess."
- **Who Benefits from the Ruling:** Under US law, only the "importer of record" — typically a US company — may file refund claims with Customs. Foreign exporters cannot directly claim refunds. Whether exporters benefit depends on private contractual arrangements, including tariff-sharing clauses and retroactive price-adjustment mechanisms. There is no automatic government-to-government mechanism to channel refunds back to foreign exporters.
- **China Stands to Gain the Most on Paper:** China accounted for roughly one-third of US tariff collections in CY2025, with importers of Chinese goods paying approximately $91.8 billion in customs duties. If a significant share of post-April collections is refunded, the largest nominal relief would accrue to importers dealing in Chinese goods, though whether Chinese firms themselves benefit depends on private contractual law.

Deal in deep water

In the News: The United Kingdom's draft legislation to ratify the transfer of sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius is currently progressing through Parliament. The deal has come under sharp criticism from US President Donald Trump, who called it "an act of great stupidity" and urged the UK to "not give away Diego Garcia," where a major US-UK joint military base is located in the central Indian Ocean.

Key Points:
- **About the Chagos Islands:** Officially referred to as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), the Chagos archipelago consists of 60 islands set in seven ring-shaped coral atolls, located in the central Indian Ocean approximately 1,600 km

from the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent and about 2,000 km north-east of Mauritius. The largest island, Diego Garcia, hosts a joint US-UK military base with an airfield, a deep-water port, and communications and surveillance infrastructure. The islands currently have no permanent civilian population.

- **Historical Background:** The islands were uninhabited when discovered by Portuguese explorers in the 16th century. France took control in the late 18th century, treating them as dependencies of Mauritius. The UK took over in the early 19th century, and Mauritius and its dependencies were formally proclaimed British colonies under the Treaty of Paris in 1814. Seychelles was detached from Mauritius in 1903. The BIOT came into being in 1965 following a US-UK agreement. Mauritius gained independence in 1968, with the UK paying it a £3 million grant to retain control over the Chagos Islands. In 1971, a military facility was constructed on Diego Garcia and the local Chagossian population — descended from African slaves and Indian plantation workers — were relocated to Seychelles or Mauritius.
- **Legal and Decolonisation Disputes:** In 2000, the British High Court found the removal of Chagossians to be illegal and granted them the right to return, which was upheld by the Court of Appeal in 2007 but reversed by the House of Lords in 2008. In 2019, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory ruling finding that the decolonisation of Mauritius was incomplete and illegal, recommending that the UK end its administration of the islands.
- **The Deal:** An agreement was sketched out in October 2024 and a final treaty transferring sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius was signed in May 2025 by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Mauritius Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam. The plan, estimated to cost £3.4 billion, envisages the UK handing over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while leasing back the Diego Garcia military base for 99 years at an average cost of £101 million per year. The deal includes a £40 million trust fund to support Chagossians, who will be permitted to resettle in all islands except Diego Garcia. Before the treaty enters into force, it must be ratified through legislation currently progressing through the UK Parliament.
- **Trump's Opposition:** US President Donald Trump has strongly criticised the deal, calling it "an act of great stupidity" and describing the potential loss as "a blight on our Great Ally." Trump described Diego Garcia as "strategically located" and suggested the island may be needed to counter threats from Iran. He also linked the deal to his own stated desire to acquire Greenland, framing territorial control as a broader strategic priority.
- **UK's Justification:** The UK government has maintained that the deal is vital for its security interests. Prime Minister Starmer argued the agreement was necessary to avert the risk of a future binding legal judgment affecting the UK's ability to continue using the Diego Garcia base, which would have posed a far greater security risk.

India-US Vajra Prahar 2026: Special Forces Gear Up for 16th Joint Exercise in Himachal

In the News: India and the United States commenced the 16th edition of Exercise Vajra Prahar from February 23 to March 15, 2026, at the Special Forces Training School, Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh. The annual joint Special Forces exercise aims to deepen defence cooperation, enhance interoperability, and strengthen combined counter-terrorism capabilities between the two nations.

Key Points:
- **About Exercise Vajra Prahar:** A bilateral Special Forces exercise conducted alternately in India and the United States, focusing on promoting military cooperation through enhanced interoperability, jointness, and mutual exchange of advanced special operations tactics, techniques, and procedures.
- **16th Edition — Key Details:** Held from February 23 to March 15, 2026, at the Special Forces Training School, Bakloh, Himachal Pradesh. The Indian contingent comprises Indian Army Special Forces units while the US side is represented by the US Army Green Berets.
- **Training Focus Areas:** The exercise covers close-quarter battle drills, counter-terrorism operations, urban warfare simulations, high-altitude and desert/semi-desert environment scenario training, and exchange of advanced special operations tactics and techniques.

- **Previous Editions:** The 15th edition (2024) was held in Idaho, USA with 45 personnel from each side. The 14th edition (2023) was conducted at Umroi, Meghalaya, featuring helocasting operations and joint drills using Mi-17 helicopters at Umiam Lake.
- **Other Major India-US Joint Military Exercises:** Yudh Abhyas (Army), Malabar (Naval), and Cope India (Air Force).
- **Exercise Vayushakti-26 (Related Development):** The Indian Air Force will demonstrate its operational prowess at the Pokhran Air-to-Ground Range, Jaisalmer on February 27, 2026, featuring full-spectrum operations with platforms including Tejas, Rafale, Sukhoi-30MKI, Mirage-2000, Jaguar, MiG-29, C-130J, C-17, Apache, Chinook, and RPAs. Advanced weapon systems such as Akash, SpyDer, SRLM, and Counter-UAS systems will also be demonstrated alongside day, dusk, and night missions and HADR capabilities.

'One Battle After Another' Dominates 2026 BAFTAs with Six Wins: Check Full List of Winners

In the News: The 79th British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA 2026) were held on February 22, 2026, at London's Royal Festival Hall, hosted by Alan Cumming. Paul Thomas Anderson's 'One Battle After Another' emerged as the biggest winner of the night, sweeping six awards including Best Film and Best Director. The ceremony was notable for Robert Aramayo winning both Best Actor and the Rising Star Award.

Key Points:

- **About BAFTA:** An annual award ceremony honoring excellence in British and international films, presented by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. First held on May 29, 1949 in the UK, it has been officially known as the EE British Academy Film Awards since 2013 and has been broadcast by the BBC since 1956.
- **'One Battle After Another' — Six Wins:** The top film of the night won Best Film, Best Director (Paul Thomas Anderson — his first-ever BAFTA Best Director win), Adapted Screenplay, Supporting Actor (Sean Penn), Cinematography (Michael Bauman), and Editing (Andy Jurgensen).
- **Sinners — Three Wins:** Original Screenplay (Ryan Coogler), Supporting Actress (Wunmi Mosaku), and Original Score (Ludwig Göransson).
- **Hamnet — Two Wins:** Outstanding British Film and Leading Actress (Jessie Buckley).
- **Frankenstein — Three Wins (Crafts):** Costume Design (Kate Hawley), Make Up & Hair, and Production Design.
- **Key Acting Honours:** Leading Actor — Robert Aramayo (*I Swear*); Leading Actress — Jessie Buckley (*Hamnet*); Supporting Actor — Sean Penn (*One Battle After Another*); Supporting Actress — Wunmi Mosaku (*Sinners*); EE Rising Star Award (public vote) — Robert Aramayo.
- **Other Major Category Winners:** Film Not in the English Language — *Sentimental Value*; Documentary — *Mr. Nobody Against Putin*; Animated Film — *Zootropolis 2*; Children's & Family Film — Boong (historic win for India); Outstanding Debut — *My Father's Shadow*; Sound — *F1*; Special Visual Effects — *Avatar: Fire and Ash*; British Short Film — *This Is Endometriosis*; British Short Animation — *Two Black Boys In Paradise*.
- **Special Honours:** BAFTA Fellowship — Donna Langley; Outstanding British Contribution to Cinema — Clare Binns.
- **Notable Highlights:** Leonardo DiCaprio (*One Battle After Another*) was nominated for Leading Actor but did **not** win. *Boong* winning Best Children's & Family Film was celebrated as a historic win for India.

India-US trade deal: Why a 'modify commitments' clause in framework agreement offers New Delhi wriggle room

In the News: India's trade negotiations with the United States have entered a complex phase following a US Supreme Court ruling that struck down President Trump's sweeping tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). This development has activated a critical 'modify commitments' clause (Clause 8) in the India-US Framework for an Interim Trade Agreement, potentially allowing India to recalibrate its concessions and pause or renegotiate the deal.

Key Points:

- **Background — India-US Trade Framework:** India and the US reached a Framework for an Interim Trade Agreement earlier in February 2026, based on a US-India Joint Statement dated February 6, 2026. The deal was still under negotiation — no legal text had been signed yet. Indian trade negotiators were headed to Washington DC for three-day talks to finalise the legal text but aborted the trip as New Delhi pushed for rescheduling.

- **The Critical Clause 8 — 'Modify Commitments':** Clause 8 states that in the event of any changes to agreed-upon tariffs by either country, the other country may modify its commitments. This clause was an insertion from the Indian side, anticipating legal challenges to Trump's tariffs. Following the Supreme Court ruling, India can potentially invoke it to argue that America's commitments now stand "modified", giving India room to recalibrate its own tariff and non-tariff concessions.

- **US Supreme Court Ruling — Impact on Tariffs:** The US Supreme Court ruled that President Trump overstepped his powers by imposing tariffs under the IEEPA. The earlier 18% "concessional" tariff offered to India has now been replaced with a flat 15% tariff for all US trading partners, imposed under Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act. This 15% tariff is temporary — valid for only around 150 days (5 months), after which Congressional approval is required.

- **India's Tariff Journey — Timeline:** Since August 2025, India faced a cumulative tariff of 50% (reciprocal tariff + Russian oil penalty). After the framework deal, it reduced to 25% (Russian oil penalty removed). After the Supreme Court ruling, it now stands at a flat 15%. India's weighted average effective tariff into the US has fallen from ~34% to approximately 9%.

- **India's Strategic Position:** Under the earlier deal, India was expected to offer major concessions — cutting tariffs, aligning economic policies with US interests, easing regulations, and committing to large purchases of American products — all in exchange for the 18% rate. Now, even without a deal, India faces only 15%, making the negotiated arrangement appear burdensome and one-sided. Former trade negotiator Ajay Srivastava (GTRI) advised India to proceed with "caution and strategic clarity" and invoke Clause 8 to pause negotiations.

- **Legal Uncertainty Around US Trade Authority:** The White House's legal authority to execute these agreements — none approved by Congress — is now unclear. The 15% Section 122 tariff is also open to legal challenge, as the administration must prove balance-of-payments difficulties as justification. Any new preferential deal must offer a rate lower than 15% to be meaningful for trade partners.

- **Eye on China:** US President Trump is set to visit China from March 31 to April 2, 2026, with trade talks expected. India will closely watch the outcome before finalising its own position. China currently faces cumulative tariffs of ~45%. With the flat 15% rate, most major economies — India, China, Japan, South Korea, most of ASEAN, Brazil, and Mexico — are now at a lower tariff rate than before the Supreme Court ruling.

PM Modi's Historic Israel Visit: First Indian Leader to Address the Knesset Plenum

In the News: Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his two-day visit to Israel, becoming the first Indian Prime Minister to address the Israeli Knesset plenum. Modi held high-level talks with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog, marking a major milestone in India-Israel relations. The visit comes nine years after his historic 2017 trip and amid ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East.

Key Points:
- **Historic Knesset Address:** Modi addressed the Knesset plenum at 5:00 PM local time on February 25, 2026 — the first Indian PM ever to do so. The special parliamentary session was attended by Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana, PM Netanyahu, Opposition Leader Yair Lapid, and their respective spouses.

- **Official Programme at the Knesset:** The visit began at 16:30 with a welcome ceremony in the Weil Courtyard, followed by signing the guestbook in the Chagall State Hall at 16:35, a joint photograph session, and the special plenary session at 17:00 in Modi's honour.

- **India-Israel Relations Background:** India formally established diplomatic ties with Israel in January 1992. Since then, cooperation has expanded across defence, agriculture, water technology, and trade. India is currently Israel's second-largest Asian trading partner, with bilateral trade rising from $200 million in 1992 to $6.5 billion in 2024.

- **Domestic Political Controversy in Israel:** The visit became entangled in Israel's internal politics. Opposition leader Yair Lapid threatened to boycott the special session unless Supreme Court President Yitzhak Amit was invited per parliamentary convention. The dispute is linked to the ongoing judicial reform controversy deeply polarising Israeli politics.
- **India's Evolving Stance on Palestine:** India's position on Palestine has shifted considerably — from Gandhi and Nehru's strong pro-Palestinian stance (voting against Israel's UN membership in 1949) to the current Modi era of open strategic partnership with Israel. India joined over 100 nations in condemning Israel's expansion in the occupied West Bank just days before Modi's visit.
- **Second Visit to Israel:** This is Modi's second visit to Israel, following his landmark 2017 trip which was itself historic as the first ever visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Israel. Netanyahu also visited New Delhi in January 2018.

India Drops Most Favoured Nation Status in France In Tax Pact

In the News: India has removed the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause from its tax treaty with France. The revised India-France Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) was announced in February 2026, days after French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India, during which the two nations elevated their relationship to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership". The updated treaty changes dividend tax rates, redefines capital gains taxation, and incorporates global anti-tax avoidance (BEPS) standards.

Key Points:
- **What is the MFN Clause?** The Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause in a tax treaty automatically extends lower tax rates or better terms that India grants to any other country to the treaty partner — without fresh negotiations. Under the old India-France DTAC (signed in 1992), France could automatically claim the benefit of any lower tax rate India offered to another OECD member country.
- **Why Was the MFN Clause Removed?** India's Supreme Court ruled in 2023 that MFN benefits cannot be applied automatically and require a formal government notification. The MFN removal aligns the treaty with this ruling and with India's current treaty policy. It reduces long-running tax disputes, prevents automatic application of future treaty benefits, brings legal clarity, and protects India's taxation rights.
- **Revised Dividend Tax Rates:** Under the new treaty, French companies holding at least 10% stake in an Indian company will pay 5% tax on dividends — reduced from the earlier 10%. However, French investors holding less than 10% stake will now face a higher dividend tax of 15%, up from the earlier 10%. Major French companies like Sanofi, Renault, and L'Oreal with significant India investments could benefit from the lower rate.
- **BEPS Provisions Added:** The revised treaty incorporates global anti-tax avoidance standards under BEPS (Base Erosion and Profit Shifting), including prevention of profit shifting, stronger permanent establishment rules, clear definition of fees for technical services, and better exchange of tax information between India and France.
- **India-France Bilateral Context:** The treaty revision was welcomed in a joint statement on February 17, 2026, during Macron's India visit. Bilateral trade between India and France stood at $15 billion in 2025. As of January 2026, France-based foreign portfolio investors held shares worth $21 billion in Indian companies. The two nations also deepened cooperation in defence and space technology during the visit.

Delhi Airport Ranked 5th in Apac Busiest Airports 2025

In the News: According to the latest OAG (Official Aviation Guide) data for 2025, Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport has been ranked the 5th-busiest airport in the Asia Pacific (APAC) region, recording 46.18 million one-way departing seats. This marks a dramatic rise from its 9th position in 2019, overtaking major global aviation hubs including Singapore Changi, Bangkok Suvarnabhumi, and Seoul Incheon. The surge reflects India's booming domestic air travel demand and aggressive capacity expansion by carriers like IndiGo.

Key Points:

- **Delhi Airport's 2025 Ranking:** Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) has been ranked 5th among the busiest airports in the Asia Pacific region in 2025, according to OAG data. The airport recorded 46.18 million one-way departing seats, a sharp rise from its 9th position in 2019 — before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **About OAG Data & Methodology:** OAG (Official Aviation Guide) is a leading global aviation data and analytics provider. The rankings are based on scheduled airline seat supply (one-way departing seat capacity), not actual passenger footfall. This measures the total capacity offered by airlines operating from each airport.
- **Airports Overtaken by Delhi in 2025:** Delhi airport surpassed three major established APAC aviation hubs — Seoul Incheon International Airport (43.40 million seats), Singapore Changi Airport (42.57 million seats), and Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport (39.49 million seats). In 2019, all three airports were significantly busier than Delhi.
- **Key Drivers of Growth:** The dramatic ranking improvement is attributed to India's rapidly expanding middle class, affordable airfares driven by low-cost carriers, improved airport infrastructure, and aggressive capacity expansion by IndiGo — India's largest airline. Both domestic and international routes contributed to seat capacity growth.
- **India's Post-Pandemic Aviation Boom:** The jump from 9th in 2019 to 5th in 2025 reflects a structural transformation in India's aviation sector. India's air travel market has grown faster than most APAC peers post-pandemic, driven by rising aspirational travel demand, government infrastructure push, and airline fleet expansion.
- **About Indira Gandhi International Airport:** Located in New Delhi, IGIA is India's busiest and one of South Asia's largest airports. It is operated by Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), a GMR Group-led consortium. The airport serves as a major hub for both domestic and international air travel in India.

'Boong' Puts India on the Map with First-Ever BAFTA Children's Film Award

In the News: At the 79th British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA 2026) held in London, the Manipuri-language film Boong made history by winning the Best Children's and Family Film award — becoming the first Indian film ever to win in this category. Directed by Lakshmipriya Devi in her feature debut and produced by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment, the film beat major Hollywood titles including Disney's Lilo & Stitch and Zootopia 2.

Key Points:

- **Historic BAFTA Win:** Boong won the Best Children's and Family Film award at the 79th BAFTA Awards 2026. It is the first Indian film ever to win in this category at the British Academy Film Awards. It was also the only Indian film nominated at BAFTA 2026. Farhan Akhtar attended the ceremony and collected the award on behalf of the team.
- **About BAFTA:** BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) awards are among the most prestigious film honours globally, often described as the UK equivalent of the Oscars. Winning a BAFTA significantly boosts a film's global visibility and credibility.
- **Director – Lakshmipriya Devi:** Boong marks the feature film debut of writer-director Lakshmipriya Devi. Her direction has been widely praised for capturing Manipur's landscape, culture, and emotional depth, bringing Northeast India's stories to the international stage. She also received a nomination for Best Debut Director at the 55th International Film Festival of India.
- **Production & Cast:** The film is produced by Farhan Akhtar, Ritesh Sidhwani, Alan McAlex, Vikesh Bhutani, and Shujaat Saudagar under the banners of Excel Entertainment, Chalkboard Entertainment, and Suitable Pictures. Newcomer Gugun Kipgen plays the lead role of Boong (Brojendro), with Bala Hijam as his mother Mandakini. The film runs for 94 minutes.
- **Global Film Festival Journey:** Before its BAFTA win, Boong premiered at the 2024 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in the Discovery section. It was subsequently screened at Warsaw International Film Festival, Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, Adelaide Film Festival, MAMI Mumbai Film Festival 2024, 55th International Film Festival of India, and Indian Film Festival of Melbourne 2025.
- **Previous Awards & Recognition:** Prior to BAFTA, Boong won the Best Youth Film award at the 17th Asia Pacific Screen Awards in Australia and received honours at the International South Asian Film Festival in Canada. The film's global festival run built significant momentum leading to its historic BAFTA triumph.

Sachin Tendulkar Named UN Global Road Safety Champion

In the News: Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar has been designated a 'Global Champion for Road Safety' by the United Nations, joining a group of prominent international figures advocating for safer roads worldwide. The announcement was marked by the release of a video message in which Tendulkar urged citizens to adopt responsible driving habits and prioritise road safety. The initiative is part of broader UN efforts to reduce road traffic fatalities globally, including in India.

Key Points:

- **UN Designation:** Sachin Tendulkar has been officially designated as a 'Global Champion for Road Safety' by the United Nations. He joins a group of prominent international figures who advocate for safer roads as part of the UN's global road safety campaign. The core message of his advocacy is 'Every life matters.'
- **Tendulkar's Appeal:** In a video message released on the occasion, Tendulkar emphasised that discipline and awareness are essential not just in sport but also on roads. He urged citizens to wear seat belts, use helmets, stay alert, and respect traffic rules — stressing that such everyday actions can prevent fatalities. He highlighted that road crash fatality rates remain disproportionately high compared to vehicle volumes.
- **UN Decade of Action for Road Safety:** Tendulkar's designation is part of the UN's broader Decade of Action for Road Safety initiative, which aims to halve global road traffic deaths through improved enforcement, infrastructure development, and public awareness campaigns. Road traffic injuries are a leading cause of death globally, especially among young people.
- **UN Support for Indian States:** UN entities in India, including the World Health Organization (WHO), have launched a programme providing financial and technical assistance to four states — Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam. These states have been selected for establishing institutional mechanisms to systematically address road safety challenges.
- **Focus Areas of the State Programme:** The UN-backed programme focuses on improving accident blackspots (high-risk road locations with frequent accidents), creating safer school zones, enhancing pedestrian and cycling facilities, and strengthening post-crash emergency care systems in the four selected states.

Trump's tariffs are here to stay: How State of the Union address echoes Peter Navarro's claim

In the News: India's trade negotiations with the United States have entered a complex phase following a US Supreme Court ruling that struck down President Trump's sweeping tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). This has activated a critical 'modify commitments' clause (Clause 8) in the India-US Framework for an Interim Trade Agreement, potentially allowing India to recalibrate its concessions and pause or renegotiate the deal.

Key Points:

- **Background — India-US Trade Framework:** India and the US reached a Framework for an Interim Trade Agreement in February 2026, based on a US-India Joint Statement dated February 6, 2026. The deal was still under negotiation — no legal text had been signed. Indian trade negotiators aborted their Washington DC trip as New Delhi pushed for rescheduling.
- **The Critical Clause 8 — 'Modify Commitments':** Clause 8 states that in the event of any changes to agreed-upon tariffs by either country, the other may modify its commitments. Inserted at India's insistence to anticipate legal challenges to Trump's tariffs, India can now invoke it to argue America's commitments stand "modified" — giving India room to recalibrate its own tariff and non-tariff concessions.
- **US Supreme Court Ruling — Impact on Tariffs:** The Court ruled that Trump overstepped his powers under IEEPA. The earlier 18% concessional tariff for India has been replaced by a flat 15% tariff for all US trading partners under Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act. This 15% rate is temporary, valid for only 150 days, after which Congressional approval is required.

- **India's Tariff Journey — Timeline:** Since August 2025, India faced 50% cumulative tariff (reciprocal + Russian oil penalty). After the framework deal: reduced to 25% (Russian oil penalty removed). After the Supreme Court ruling: now at flat 15%. India's weighted average effective tariff into the US has fallen from ~34% to approximately 9%.
- **India's Strategic Position:** Under the earlier deal, India was expected to offer major concessions — cutting tariffs, aligning economic policies, easing regulations, and committing to large purchases of American products — all in exchange for the 18% rate. Now, even without a deal, India faces only 15%, making the negotiated arrangement appear burdensome and one-sided. Former trade negotiator Ajay Srivastava (GTRI) advised India to proceed with "caution and strategic clarity" and invoke Clause 8 to pause negotiations.
- **Legal Uncertainty Around US Trade Authority:** The White House's legal authority to execute these agreements — none approved by Congress — is now unclear. The 15% Section 122 tariff is also open to legal challenge as the administration must prove balance-of-payments difficulties as justification. Any new preferential deal must offer a rate lower than 15% to be meaningful.

Indian Youth Rank 60th in Global Mental Health Study

In the News: The US-based Sapien Labs released the Global Mind Health 2025 report, in which young adults in India (aged 18–34) ranked 60th among 84 countries in mental well-being, revealing a sharp generational divide in mental health outcomes across the country.

Key Points:
- **About the Report & Methodology:** The study was conducted by Sapien Labs' Global Mind Project, surveying over 78,000 internet-enabled individuals in India and over one million respondents globally across 84 countries. Mental well-being was assessed using the Mind Health Quotient (MHQ), a composite metric evaluating 47 cognitive, emotional, social, and physical indicators.
- **Sharp Generational Divide:** Young Indian adults (18–34) recorded an average MHQ score of 33, placing them 60th globally. In contrast, Indians aged 55 and above scored 96, ranking 49th globally and aligning with functional norms of mental health — nearly three times higher than the youth score.
- **Key Drivers of Declining Well-Being:** The report identified four major contributors — family bonds, spirituality, ultra-processed food (UPF) consumption, and early smartphone exposure. Only 64% of young adults reported being close to their families versus 78% among the 55+ group. UPF consumption among youth stood at 44% compared to just 11% among older adults. India ranked 71st in age of first smartphone exposure, with the average age being 16.5 years — and falling further in younger cohorts.
- **Broader Implications:** MHQ is linearly related to productivity, meaning declines will have a substantial impact on economic activity. The Social Self sub-measure, which is negatively correlated with violent crime rates, is falling most steeply across generations, predicting rising rates of violent crime worldwide.
- **Global Comparisons:** Globally, young adults in economically developed countries reported poorer mental health than peers in less developed regions. Countries like Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, the UK, and China ranked near the bottom for youth mental health, while several sub-Saharan African nations such as Ghana and Nigeria performed relatively better.

India-Sweden SITAC Partnership

In the News: On the sidelines of the India AI Impact Summit 2026, the IndiaAI Mission and Business Sweden signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) to strengthen bilateral cooperation in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technologies, and to promote trade and investment between India and Sweden.

Key Points:

- **Statement of Intent (SoI):** The SoI provides a structured framework for collaboration on the development, application, and deployment of AI solutions, with emphasis on real-world industrial and societal outcomes, while addressing associated risks.
- **SITAC — The Flagship Platform:** Both countries will jointly develop the Sweden–India Technology and Artificial Intelligence Corridor (SITAC), serving as the flagship platform to facilitate structured engagement among government agencies, industry stakeholders, startups, and academic institutions from both countries.
- **Key Activities Under SITAC:** Activities include organisation of conferences, seminars and thematic workshops, facilitation of exchanges between Indian and Swedish AI ecosystems, field visits to innovation hubs and centres of excellence, engagements among companies, investors, researchers and policymakers, identification of joint innovation platforms and investment corridors, and promotion of bilateral deployment of AI solutions across priority sectors.
- **Synergy of Strengths:** The partnership aligns IndiaAI Mission's focus on building a national AI ecosystem through access to compute, data, and talent with Sweden's strengths in industrial innovation, advanced R&D, and responsible AI implementation.
- **Shared Values:** The collaboration reflects complementary strengths and shared democratic values, positioning both nations to shape the next phase of global technological transformation.

India-Israel Strategic Partnership: UPI Launch & Free Trade Agreement 2026

In the News: During PM Narendra Modi's second state visit to Israel in February 2026, India and Israel officially elevated their bilateral ties to a 'Special Strategic Partnership', backed by 16 landmark agreements spanning Fintech, Defence, Trade, AI, and Green Energy. This is Modi's second state visit to Israel in nine years.

Key Points:
- **Partnership Upgrade:** Following delegation-level talks between PM Modi and PM Benjamin Netanyahu, India and Israel upgraded their relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership, with Modi describing it as "time-tested" and rooted in shared democratic values and deep trust.
- **UPI in Israel:** NPCI International (NIPL) signed an agreement with MASAV (Israel's central payment processor) to roll out UPI in Israel — enabling Indian tourists and professionals to make merchant payments and cross-border remittances. Israel joins Singapore, UAE, France, and Sri Lanka in adopting India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).
- **Free Trade Agreement (FTA):** The first comprehensive round of FTA negotiations concluded on February 26, 2026. Current bilateral merchandise trade stands at $3.62 billion (FY 2024-25), with both sides working toward a mutually beneficial trade deal.
- **Emerging Technologies:** Both nations signed joint declarations on Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, and Critical Minerals (for EV battery supply chains), launching a new India-Israel partnership on critical and emerging technologies.
- **Energy & Cybersecurity:** New frameworks established for cooperation in Civil Nuclear Energy, maritime heritage protection, agriculture, and cybersecurity.
- **Gaza & Regional Peace:** Modi reaffirmed India's support for the Gaza Peace Plan, stating "humanity must never become a victim of conflict." India is also implementing $170 million in development projects for the Palestinian community, with an additional $40 million in education and healthcare initiatives planned.
- **Regional Frameworks Reviewed:** Leaders reviewed progress on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and cooperation under the I2U2 framework (India, Israel, UAE, USA).

Operation Ghazab lil-Haq: Pakistan Declares 'Open War' After Strikes on Afghanistan

In the News: Pakistan declared "open war" on Afghanistan on February 27, 2026, launching Operation Ghazab Lil Haq ("Wrath for Justice") — a large-scale military offensive involving coordinated air and ground strikes targeting Taliban infrastructure across major Afghan cities and provinces.

Key Points:

- **Trigger:** Taliban forces allegedly opened unprovoked fire on Pakistani border positions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Chitral, Khyber, Mohmand, Kurram, and Bajaur sectors, prompting Pakistan's military response.
- **Operation Ghazab Lil Haq:** Pakistan launched precision airstrikes and ground operations targeting Taliban military infrastructure in Kabul, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Paktia — including ammunition depots, brigade and corps headquarters, and logistics bases.
- **Casualties Claimed (Pakistan's figures):** 133 Afghan Taliban fighters killed, over 200 wounded, 27 Taliban posts destroyed, and 9 captured. Two Pakistani security personnel were also killed.
- **Afghanistan's Counter-Claims:** The Taliban-led government claimed it killed 55 Pakistani soldiers, captured 19 Pakistani military posts, and seized a major headquarters at Anzar Sar in Khost province. These claims could not be independently verified.
- **Pakistan's Justification:** Defence Minister Khawaja Asif accused Afghanistan of sheltering militant groups — including Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — and allowing terrorism to be exported from Afghan soil. PM Shehbaz Sharif backed the military's actions, stating Pakistan's forces have full capability to counter any aggression.
- **Historical Context:** Tensions stem from longstanding disputes over the Durand Line — the 19th-century border demarcation disputed by Kabul — and have intensified since NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

UN Road Safety Fund Launched Road Safety Financing Project in India

In the News: The United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF) launched a Sustainable Road Safety Financing Project in New Delhi, in partnership with four Indian states, to strengthen road safety funding mechanisms and reduce road traffic deaths by 50% by 2030.

Key Points:
- **Project Launch:** The UNRSF launched the Sustainable Road Safety Financing Project on 24 February 2026 in New Delhi, in the presence of Jean Todt, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety. The project aims to help India develop a comprehensive national strategy for sustainable road safety financing at both national and state levels.
- **States Covered:** The project will be implemented across four states — Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam — under the coordination of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, focusing on building national and sub-national capacities for road safety action plans.
- **Key Partners:** The project is implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), State Governments, WHO, UNICEF, and the Save LIFE Foundation, ensuring technical expertise and on-ground support.
- **Alignment with Global Goals:** The initiative is aligned with the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030, which targets at least a 50% reduction in road traffic deaths and injuries by 2030. It also supports UN General Assembly Resolution A/78/L.78 on improving global road safety systems.
- **India's Road Safety Crisis:** India records approximately 600 road crash deaths daily (25 per hour). The World Bank estimates that road accidents cost India around 7% of its GDP in economic and social losses. Sustainable financing aims to strengthen enforcement, awareness, road infrastructure, trauma care, and data-driven safety interventions.
- **About UNRSF:** Established in 2018 by the United Nations as a global trust fund, the UNRSF supports road safety initiatives primarily in low- and middle-income countries, helping them design and implement effective road safety strategies.

SCIENCE AND TECH

AI Impact Summit: 85 countries, 3 bodies sign New Delhi Declaration

In the News: The AI Impact Summit 2026, held in New Delhi on February 18–19, 2026, concluded with the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact. A total of 85 countries and 3 international organisations — including both the

United States and China — endorsed the Declaration, reflecting a broad-based global consensus on leveraging artificial intelligence for economic growth and social good. The Summit was organised around the guiding principle of "Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya" (Welfare for all, Happiness for all).

Key Points:
- **About the New Delhi Declaration:** The Declaration is a landmark outcome of the AI Impact Summit 2026 hosted by India. Endorsed by 89 countries and international organisations including the US, China, EU, and IFAD, it underscores that the benefits of AI must be equitably shared across humanity. It emphasises strengthening international cooperation, respecting national sovereignty, and advancing AI through accessible and trustworthy frameworks. As with the 2023 G20 Summit, the road to consensus was built on non-binding and voluntary commitments.
- **Seven Pillars (Chakras) of the Declaration:** The Declaration is structured around seven key action pillars — Democratizing AI Resources; Economic Growth and Social Good; Secure and Trusted AI; AI for Science; Access for Social Empowerment; Human Capital Development; and Resilient, Efficient and Innovative AI Systems.
- **Charter for the Democratic Diffusion of AI:** Inspired by the principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), this voluntary and non-binding framework aims to promote affordable access to foundational AI resources, support locally relevant innovation, and strengthen resilient AI ecosystems while respecting national laws.
- **Global AI Impact Commons:** A voluntary platform introduced to encourage and enable the adoption, replication, and scale-up of successful AI use cases across regions, enabling cross-country collaboration for development impact and providing governments with practical examples to draw inspiration from.
- **International Network of AI for Science Institutions:** A voluntary and collaborative platform to connect scientific communities and pool AI research capabilities across regions among participating institutions, aimed at accelerating the impactful adoption of AI in scientific research and development.
- **AI for Social Empowerment Platform:** A voluntary and collaborative platform to facilitate exchange of learning, knowledge, and scalable practices to advance AI adoption for social empowerment, enabling individuals to access knowledge, services, and opportunities across borders.
- **AI Workforce Development Playbook and Reskilling Principles:** The Declaration introduced voluntary guiding principles for reskilling in the age of AI and a playbook on AI workforce development, aimed at supporting nations in expanding AI literacy, skilling and reskilling, training of public officials, and upgrading vocational ecosystems to prepare for an AI-driven economy.
- **India-US Bilateral Outcome:** On the margins of the Summit, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy Michael Kratsios witnessed the signing of the Pax Silica Declaration and a Joint Statement on the "AI Opportunity Partnership," reflecting deepening India-US cooperation in the AI domain.

New Kashmir wheat varieties to solve crop cycle issue
In the News: Scientists at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, Kashmir (SKUAST-K) have developed two new early-maturing wheat varieties — Shalimar Wheat-3 (SW-3) and Shalimar Wheat-4 (SW-4) — aimed at resolving the long-standing rice-wheat crop rotation problem in Kashmir. The varieties are designed to mature before June, enabling farmers to vacate their fields in time for paddy transplantation.

Key Points:
- **The Problem — Broken Crop Cycle:** Wheat is a rabi crop sown in October and typically harvested in early summer. In Kashmir, where rice is the dominant kharif crop, farmers need to vacate their fields by May-June to transplant paddy. Earlier wheat varieties, mostly sourced from sub-tropical regions like Haryana and Delhi, tended to mature late — around June or July — in Kashmir's climatic conditions, causing the rice-wheat rotation to break down and affecting food security and livelihoods.

- **About the New Varieties:** SKUAST-K developed two new wheat varieties after nearly a decade of research under the All India Coordinated Project on Wheat and Barley, funded by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Shalimar Wheat-4 (SW-4) matures by the last week of May, while Shalimar Wheat-3 (SW-3) matures in the first week of June, both fitting comfortably within the rice-wheat rotation window. The new varieties are suited for mid-altitude regions up to approximately 1,850 metres above sea level.
- **Breeding Methodology:** The varieties were developed using conventional breeding techniques including cross-breeding and pedigree selection. Scientists generated thousands of progenies from hundreds of crosses and screened thousands of pedigree lines before identifying promising candidates. The entire process — from lab selection to farmer field trials and official release — took approximately 9 to 10 years, involving testing at multiple university research stations and real farmers' fields with support from the Agriculture Department.
- **Key Features of SW-3:** Beyond early maturity, SW-3 is also biofortified with iron and zinc content of more than 40 ppm, has a protein content of 12%, is resistant to yellow rust disease, and has a potential productivity of up to 38 quintals per hectare. It represents a significant advance in combining nutritional quality with agronomic performance.
- **Yellow Rust Resistance:** Both varieties are resistant to yellow rust, a fungal disease that gives leaves a rusty-yellow appearance, causes stunting, and reduces yield. Yellow rust has been a recurring problem for farmers in Kashmir due to the region's climatic conditions, and resistance significantly reduces crop risk, especially in years with favourable conditions for disease outbreaks.
- **Early Maturity vs Yield Trade-off:** Early maturity in wheat often carries a potential yield penalty due to a negative correlation between maturity duration and yield. However, researchers have prioritised timely maturity over maximum yield because fitting into the rice-wheat cropping cycle is more critical for Kashmir's agricultural system. The new varieties are still high-yielding, but their timely maturity is considered their most valuable trait.

Google Launches Nano Banana 2 Powered by Gemini 3.1 Flash Image

In the News: Google has launched Nano Banana 2, the latest version of its AI-powered image generation and editing tool, powered by the Gemini 3.1 Flash Image model. It combines faster generation speeds with improved reasoning, better text rendering, and stronger visual quality.

Key Points:

- **Background:** The original Nano Banana launched in August 2025 for image creation and editing, followed by Nano Banana Pro in November 2025, focused on deeper reasoning and creative control. Nano Banana 2 merges the strengths of both versions.
- **Faster Generation:** Built on Gemini 3.1 Flash Image, the model delivers significantly faster rendering speeds while maintaining strong visual accuracy and photorealistic quality.
- **Advanced World Knowledge:** Uses Gemini's knowledge base alongside real-time web search data to better represent specific subjects — enabling users to create infographics, convert notes into diagrams, and generate data visualisations.
- **Improved Text Rendering & Translation:** Generates clearer, more accurate text within images (useful for marketing mockups, greeting cards, posters) and can translate and localise text directly inside an image.
- **Subject Consistency:** Maintains resemblance for up to five characters and preserves up to 14 objects in a single workflow — ideal for storyboards and multi-scene projects.
- **Availability:** Rolling out across the Gemini app, Google Search (AI Mode & Lens), AI Studio, Gemini API, Vertex AI, Flow, and Google Ads. Pro subscribers retain access to Nano Banana Pro for high-fidelity tasks.
- **Nano Banana 2 vs Pro:** Nano Banana 2 prioritises speed and instruction-following for fast creative workflows, while Nano Banana Pro remains available for enterprise-level, high-accuracy image tasks.

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AWARDS AND HONOURS

Mumbai Airport Wins Asia-Pacific Best Departure Award

In the News: Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) has been recognised as Asia-Pacific's Best Airport for Departures in the over 40-million passengers category at the 2025 Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Customer Experience Awards. The award was presented by Airports Council International (ACI) and is based entirely on passenger feedback collected under ACI's globally benchmarked and independently audited ASQ programme.

Key Points:

- **The Award & Awarding Body:** CSMIA won the Asia-Pacific Best Airport for Departures award in the over 40-million passengers category at the 2025 ASQ Customer Experience Awards. The award is presented by Airports Council International (ACI) — the global trade representative of the world's airports. The recognition is based entirely on passenger feedback, making it a direct reflection of traveller satisfaction.
- **About the ASQ Programme:** The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) programme by ACI is a globally benchmarked and independently audited framework that evaluates the complete outbound passenger experience. It assesses terminal access, check-in efficiency, security processes, boarding, ambience, retail and dining offerings, cleanliness, and staff responsiveness.
- **About CSMIA:** Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) in Mumbai is the world's busiest single-runway airport by annual passenger traffic. It is operated by Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL), a joint venture between Adani Airport Holdings Limited and the Airports Authority of India (AAI), with the Adani Group holding a majority stake.
- **International Passenger Facilities:** For international travellers, the Fast Track Immigration – Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP) facilitates expedited immigration clearance, further enhancing the departure experience for frequent international flyers.
- **Art & Cultural Integration – Terminal 2:** Beyond operational upgrades, CSMIA integrates culture into its infrastructure. Terminal 2 houses the 3.2-kilometre 'Artbeat of New India' museum corridor, featuring over 5,500 artefacts and more than 100 installations. This cultural dimension distinguishes the airport's departure experience and enhances its identity as a gateway to India.

STATIC

Proponent of temple entry, critic of Hindi policy: Story of C. Rajagopalachari

In the News: President Droupadi Murmu unveiled a statue of C. Rajagopalachari (popularly known as Rajaji or CR) in the central courtyard of Rashtrapati Bhavan, replacing the bust of British architect Edwin Lutyens. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the change, honouring Rajaji as a statesman who saw power as service. The unveiling has renewed attention to Rajaji's remarkable life — from freedom fighter and social reformer to founder of the Swatantra Party and recipient of the Bharat Ratna.

Key Points:

- **Early Life & Political Beginnings:** C. Rajagopalachari was born in December 1878 in Thorapalli village, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu (then Madras Presidency). He studied law in Madras and became politically active early — attending the 1906 and 1907 Congress sessions, being elected Chairman of Salem Municipal Council in 1917, and joining Annie Besant's Home Rule League in 1916.
- **Role in the Independence Movement:** Rajaji was one of Mahatma Gandhi's closest associates, whom Gandhi called his 'conscience keeper.' He supported the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919), led the Non-Cooperation Movement in Tamil

Nadu (1920), gave up his legal practice, and led the Salt Satyagraha in the South in April 1930 — marching from Trichy to Vedaranyam. He was imprisoned multiple times for his activism.

- **The Rajaji Formula (1942):** During the Quit India Movement of 1942, Rajaji publicly disagreed with Gandhi, arguing that a Congress–Muslim League understanding was essential. He proposed what came to be known as the Rajaji Formula — a plan for Congress-League cooperation in forming a provisional government, with a plebiscite on Pakistan to be held after the transfer of power.
- **Stance on Hindi Imposition:** In 1938, as Premier of Madras, Rajaji introduced compulsory Hindi in classes 6–8, drawing intense protests. In later years, especially during the 1965 anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu, he strongly opposed the imposition of Hindi as the sole official language.
- **Champion of Temple Entry:** Rajaji was a leading advocate for Dalit rights and temple entry. As Premier of Madras (1938), he backed legislation making discrimination in employment, education, and public spaces a punishable offence. He supported the Temple Entry Bill and directly encouraged the opening of temples to Dalits — including the famed Meenakshi Temple in Madura in 1939. The Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Bill (1939) was drafted under his leadership, resulting in temples across Tanjore and other regions being opened to Dalits.
- **Key Constitutional & Administrative Roles:** Rajaji served as Premier of Madras after Congress won under the Government of India Act, 1935. In 1948, he succeeded Lord Mountbatten as Governor-General — becoming the only Indian to hold the post before India became a republic. He proclaimed the Republic of India on January 26, 1950, and later served as Chief Minister of Madras state (1952–54) and Home Minister under Jawaharlal Nehru (1950–51).
- **Founder of the Swatantra Party (1959):** Disillusioned with the Congress party's statist and centralising policies, Rajaji founded the Swatantra Party in August 1959 as a democratic 'brake' to oppose Nehruvian socialism.
- **Legacy & Honours:** Rajaji was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1954 — India's highest civilian honour.

ENVIRONMENT

Gamini Gives Birth to Three Cubs at Kuno, India's Cheetah Count Rises to 38
In the News: A South African cheetah named Gamini has given birth to three cubs at Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, pushing India's total cheetah population to 38. This marks the ninth successful cheetah litter recorded on Indian soil since the launch of Project Cheetah in September 2022. The number of surviving Indian-born cheetah cubs has now risen to 27.

Key Points:
- **The Birth:** South African female cheetah Gamini has become a mother for the second time, delivering three cubs at Kuno National Park. The birth coincides with the completion of three years since cheetahs were reintroduced to India from South Africa.
- **Second-Time Motherhood — A Key Indicator:** Gamini being a second-time mother signals that adult females are adapting well to Indian conditions and are capable of repeated, successful reproduction — essential for building a self-sustaining cheetah population in India.
- **Recent Related Development**: Earlier in February 2026, another female cheetah Aasha (translocated from Namibia) gave birth to five cubs at Kuno, further underlining the park's central role in the programme.
- **About Project Cheetah:** Project Cheetah is considered the world's first inter-continental translocation of a large carnivore. The cheetah was declared extinct in India in 1952. In 2022–23, 20 cheetahs were brought from Namibia and South Africa to India. PM Narendra Modi personally released the first eight cheetahs on September 17, 2022 at Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh.
- **Current Status:** Total cheetah population in India: 38. Surviving Indian-born cheetah cubs: 27. Successful litters recorded at Kuno: 9.

India-Nepal MoU on Forest & Wildlife Cooperation

In the News: India and Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in New Delhi to promote bilateral cooperation in forests, wildlife, environment, biodiversity conservation, and climate change. The MoU was signed by Union Minister Bhupender Yadav (India) and Cabinet Minister Madhav Prasad Chaulagain (Nepal).

Key Points:

- **Parties to the MoU:** India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Nepal's Ministry of Forests and Environment.
- **Key Focus Species:** The MoU emphasizes biodiversity conservation strategies at the landscape level for elephants, Gangetic dolphins, rhinoceroses, snow leopards, tigers, and vultures.
- **Wildlife Corridors:** The agreement provides for restoration of wildlife corridors and interlinking areas to create transboundary conservation landscapes, improving habitat connectivity and enabling species to adapt to climate change.
- **Forest & Protected Area Management:** Strengthened management of forests and protected areas is a core component, along with promotion of smart green infrastructure in biodiversity hotspots.
- **Combating Wildlife Crime:** The MoU addresses illegal poaching, timber smuggling, and wildlife trafficking through better inter-agency coordination, intelligence sharing, and capacity building of frontline enforcement staff.
- **Climate Change Cooperation:** The agreement strengthens coordinated climate action and ecosystem-based adaptation strategies, particularly vital for Himalayan ecosystems, forests, and shared river systems.

Three Major Inland Waterways Projects Opened on Brahmaputra in Dibrugarh

In the News: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal inaugurated three major inland waterways projects on National Waterway-2 (NW-2) along the Brahmaputra River in Dibrugarh, Assam, describing the initiative as a balance of "Vikas and Virasat" aimed at strengthening trade, tourism, and cross-border connectivity in Northeast India.

Key Points:

- **Projects Inaugurated:** The three projects include the Bogibeel Customs and Immigration Complex, the Dhubri Customs and Immigration Complex, and the renovated IWAI Heritage Building in Dibrugarh. All three are located on National Waterway-2, which runs along the Brahmaputra River and serves as a crucial economic corridor for Assam and neighbouring states.
- **Bogibeel Customs and Immigration Complex:** Developed as a tourist-cum-cargo terminal, it integrates customs, immigration, and IWAI administrative functions, including arrival and departure halls, cargo storage, staff facilities, and security systems. It will facilitate smoother trade under the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route and enhance cross-border commerce and passenger movement.
- **Dhubri Customs and Immigration Complex:** Strategically located near Bangladesh and Bhutan, this complex aims to position Dhubri as a key inland trade gateway for western Assam. It strengthens regulatory oversight and supports export-import activities, contributing to the broader vision of expanding inland waterways connectivity in the region.
- **IWAI Heritage Building:** The renovated Heritage Building in Dibrugarh blends architectural restoration with modern infrastructure needs. It will support IWAI operations on NW-2 and promote riverine tourism, symbolising the government's "Vikas and Virasat" approach of combining development with heritage conservation.
- **Sagarmala Scheme Support:** The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has approved Assam's proposal for 10 waterways projects along NW-2 with a total outlay of ₹645.56 crore under the Sagarmala Scheme. Additionally, three comprehensive development projects worth ₹1,010 crore have been approved for the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers.
- **National Waterways in Northeast India:** Under the National Waterways Act 2016, 20 rivers in the Northeast have been declared National Waterways. NW-2 (Brahmaputra) is the most significant among them, with other actively developed waterways including Barak (NW-16), Dhansiri (NW-31), and Kopili (NW-57). The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) leads infrastructure development and navigability enhancement across these waterways.

UN Approves First Carbon Credits Under Paris Agreement: Big Climate Shift or Greenwashing Risk?

In the News: The United Nations approved the first-ever carbon credits under the Paris Agreement's carbon market mechanism, originating from a clean cooking project in Myanmar implemented in partnership with South Korea, marking a historic milestone in global climate governance.

Key Points:
- **First Carbon Credits Approved:** The UN Climate Change body approved the first credits under the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism (PACM). The approved project is a clean cooking initiative in Myanmar that distributes efficient cookstoves, reducing household air pollution and deforestation pressure. The credits will count toward the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of both South Korea and Myanmar.
- **About the Myanmar Clean Cooking Project:** The project distributes efficient cookstoves that burn woody biomass more effectively, requiring less fuel and emitting significantly less indoor smoke. It reduces greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation pressure while improving public health, particularly for women and girls who are most affected by indoor air pollution. Over 2 billion people globally still lack access to clean cooking, according to the WHO.
- **Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism (PACM):** The PACM operates under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement (2015), which allows cross-border carbon trading among countries. It replaces the older Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and applies stricter and more conservative emissions accounting standards. Credited emissions reductions under PACM are approximately 40% lower than under the CDM, ensuring each credited tonne genuinely represents a real-world reduction.
- **Rules Finalised at COP29:** The operational rules for the Paris Agreement carbon market were finalised at COP29 in Azerbaijan in 2024. The mechanism is supervised by an independent UN body — the Article 6.4 Supervisory Body — to maintain transparency, integrity, and inclusiveness. A growing pipeline of over 165 host-party-approved projects is transitioning from CDM to PACM, spanning sectors such as waste, energy, industry, and agriculture.

IMPORTANT DAYS

National Science Day 2026: Honouring the Raman Effect and Theme For 2026

In the News: India observed National Science Day to honour C.V. Raman's discovery of the Raman Effect in 1928, with the theme "Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat" highlighting women's leadership in STEM and India's vision of becoming a developed nation.

Key Points:
- **Background:** National Science Day is celebrated every year on 28 February to commemorate physicist C.V. Raman's discovery of the Raman Effect in 1928, which explains how light scatters when passing through a transparent material. The discovery earned him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1930, making him the first Asian scientist to win a Nobel Prize in science. The Government of India officially declared 28 February as National Science Day in 1986.
- **2026 Theme:** The theme "Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat" emphasised the critical role of women scientists in research, innovation, healthcare, space, and defence. It aligned with global initiatives like the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, focusing on reducing gender gaps in STEM and promoting equal opportunities in scientific fields.
- **National Celebrations:** Schools, colleges, and research institutions organised science exhibitions, seminars, public lectures, quiz competitions, debates, and innovation challenges. The Raman Research Institute held an 'Open Day' marking 98 years of the Raman Effect discovery, attracting over 1,000 students with live satellite demonstrations and access to its private museum.