

## Weekly Current Affairs 22nd March to 28th March 2026

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## IMPORTANT ONE LINERS

### NATIONAL

#### INS Taragiri Set for Commissioning in Indian Navy

**In the News:** The Indian Navy is set to commission INS Taragiri (F41), a stealth frigate under Project 17A, on April 3, 2026, at a ceremony in Visakhapatnam under the Eastern Naval Command. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will preside over the commissioning ceremony. The induction marks a significant step in strengthening India's maritime capabilities in the Indian Ocean region.

#### Key Points:

- **About INS Taragiri:** INS Taragiri is the fourth ship of the Nilgiri-class stealth frigates being constructed under Project 17A by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai. It has been designed by the Warship Design Bureau (WDB) and is a modern reincarnation of the earlier INS Taragiri, a Leander-class frigate that previously served in the Indian Navy.
- **Project 17A Fleet:** Taragiri is the fourth of seven Project 17A frigates being built for the Indian Navy. Ships already commissioned include INS Nilgiri, INS Himgiri, and INS Udaygiri, while INS Dunagiri, INS Vindhyagiri, and INS Mahendragiri are expected to join the fleet in the future. Project 17A frigates represent an upgrade over the earlier Shivalik-class (Project 17) with enhanced technological and combat capabilities.
- **Key Specifications:** INS Taragiri displaces around 6,670 tonnes and is powered by a Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) propulsion system, designed to support both high-speed and long-range operations. It features advanced stealth features and a reduced radar cross-section.
- **Indigenous Content:** The frigate has an indigenous content of more than 75%, reflecting the growing role of Indian industry and MSMEs in naval shipbuilding under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat framework.
- **Weapon Systems and Combat Suite:** INS Taragiri is armed with supersonic BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles, medium-range surface-to-air missiles (MRSAM), the MFSTAR radar system, a 76 mm Super Rapid Gun Mount (SRGM), close-in weapon systems, and anti-submarine warfare equipment including rockets and torpedoes. These systems are integrated through a modern Combat Management System.

#### Gujarat Becomes Second State to Pass the UCC Bill After Uttarakhand

**In the News:** The Gujarat Assembly has passed the Gujarat Uniform Civil Code Bill, 2026, making Gujarat the second state after Uttarakhand to adopt such a law. The Bill is in the news because it brings a common legal framework for key civil matters such as marriage, divorce, succession, and live-in relationships. The legislation also triggered extensive debate in the Assembly because of its implications for personal laws and social reform. Its passage has renewed the wider national discussion on the Uniform Civil Code.

#### Key Pointers

- Gujarat became the second state after Uttarakhand to pass a UCC law. Uttarakhand had earlier passed its UCC Bill in February 2024, and Gujarat has now followed with its own state-specific version.
- The Bill creates a common legal framework for marriage, divorce, succession, and live-in relationships. It is intended to apply uniformly across communities instead of following separate religion-based personal law rules.
- The Bill does not apply to Scheduled Tribes and certain constitutionally protected customary groups. This exemption is important from an exam perspective because it limits the scope of the code within the state.
- Registration of marriage, divorce, and live-in relationships has been made mandatory. The Bill also provides a formal process for termination of live-in relationships and grants legitimacy to children born from such unions.
- The Bill prohibits bigamy or polygamy and penalises certain unlawful marriage and divorce practices. It also provides maintenance rights to a woman deserted in a live-in relationship, giving the law a clear gender-justice dimension.

## Musi River Rejuvenation Project Explained: Key Plans and Impact

**In the News:** The **Musi River Rejuvenation Project** is back in the news because the Telangana Government has pushed forward its latest planning and budget-linked work on the project. The scheme is being presented as a major urban sustainability and river-restoration effort for Hyderabad. At the same time, it has triggered debate over cost, land acquisition, rehabilitation, and the balance between ecological restoration and riverfront development.

### Key Pointers

- The project is being implemented through the **Musi Riverfront Development Corporation Ltd.** Its official vision is to rejuvenate the Musi and transform the river's 55 km corridor into a major urban, ecological, and economic zone for Hyderabad.
- The plan includes sewage interception and treatment, flood-control measures, blue-green zones, promenades, and improved connectivity. The official vision also links the project with climate resilience, water security, and reduced urban flooding risk.
- The broader river programme also includes underground drainage networks, lake revival, culverts, and mini-canal. The stated goal is to build a more environmentally secure and water-resilient Hyderabad over the long term.
- Phase-I has been projected at roughly ₹6,500–7,000 crore and is focused on an initial stretch of the river corridor. Current plans emphasise river cleaning, flood mitigation, trunk sewer infrastructure, roads, and riverfront works.
- The project has also generated concerns over displacement, land acquisition, and rehabilitation packages. This makes the Musi project important not only as an urban infrastructure initiative but also as a governance and social-impact issue.

## CAPF Bill 2026 Explained

**In the News:** The **Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026** is in the news because it seeks to create a statutory framework for recruitment, deputation, promotion, and service conditions in the CAPFs. The Bill has drawn attention mainly because it formalises the deputation of **IPS officers** into senior CAPF leadership roles. It has also sparked debate because it comes after Supreme Court directions that had favoured greater representation for cadre officers. The measure is therefore significant both for internal security administration and for service-structure policy.

### Key Pointers

- The full title is the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026. It has been listed in Rajya Sabha business for introduction and consideration during the current Parliament session.
- The Bill is designed as an umbrella law for CAPF officer administration. It seeks to regulate recruitment, deputation, promotion, and other service conditions in a unified legal framework.
- A major provision is the statutory backing for IPS deputation at senior levels. It provides for 50% of IG posts, at least 67% of ADG posts, and 100% of SDG and DG posts to be filled through deputation.
- The Bill is also important because it effectively counters earlier judicial directions that had sought a reduction in IPS deputation. The proposal includes an overriding clause that gives the law precedence over conflicting court directions.
- The stated justification is that CAPFs perform national security and anti-insurgency functions in close coordination with States. Critics, however, argue that the Bill could limit promotion opportunities for cadre officers within the forces.

## Lok Sabha Passes Transgender Amendment Bill 2026

**In the News:** Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026 — the Lok Sabha cleared it on Tuesday by a voice vote amid an Opposition walkout, and the Rajya Sabha passed it on March 25, 2026, amid demands to refer it to a select committee.

### Key Points:

- **Key Changes Introduced by the Bill:** The Bill redefines the category of transgender persons, removes the provision of self-perceived gender identity, and excludes several socio-cultural identities as well as transmasculine individuals from its ambit.

- **New Certification Process:** Individuals must apply to the District Magistrate for an official certificate of identity. Certification will now be granted based on recommendations from a designated medical board, headed by a Chief Medical Officer or Deputy Chief Medical Officer.
- **Identity Documentation:** The amendment allows transgender persons to change their first name in official documents, including birth certificates, based on the identity certificate issued.
- **Government's Stand:** Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Dr. Virendra Kumar said the Bill will ensure protection to those who face discrimination due to biological issues, and that transgender welfare boards have been set up in over 30 states. He stated the Bill brings "administrative clarity" and is "a pathway to justice."
- **Opposition's Stand:** Opposition parties demanded the Bill be sent to a select committee for scrutiny. DMK MP Tiruchi Siva argued the amendments force transgender persons to appear before a medical board, taking away the right to self-identification. TMC MP Saket Gokhale cited that only 32,000 out of 5 lakh transgender persons (as per 2011 Census) have obtained certificates so far, and that 31% of transgender people in India have attempted suicide, with 50% of those being below the age of 20. CPI(M) MP John Brittas noted that a Supreme Court-appointed committee had conveyed to the government not to proceed with the legislation.
- **Two Members Resign:** Two members of the National Council for Transgender Persons resigned, citing the Bill as "regressive."
- **Legal Background — NALSA Judgment (2014):** The Supreme Court's NALSA judgment recognised transgender persons as a third gender and established that gender identity is a matter of personal autonomy, requiring no medical intervention. Critics argue the new Bill contradicts this ruling.
- **Constitutional Angle:** The right to self-identification is considered part of Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) of the Constitution.
- **Existing Law:** The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 provides the current legal framework for protection against discrimination, which this Bill seeks to amend.

### India Forms 7 Empowered Committees on West Asia Crisis

**In the News:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the formation of seven empowered groups of officials and experts to assess the impact of the West Asia war on India and take remedial measures across sectors. The announcement was made while addressing the Rajya Sabha.

#### Key Points:

- **Background:** Following U.S. and Israeli strikes, Iran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz — a chokepoint through which 20% of the world's oil and gas passes — causing a supply squeeze and spike in prices. India imports about 85% of its total oil and gas requirements, making it highly vulnerable.
- **Modelled After COVID Response:** The seven empowered groups were formed on the lines of a similar inter-ministerial exercise conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Panel 1 – Defence, External Affairs and Public Order:** Convenor — Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, with Home Secretary Govind Mohan and Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. Focuses on geopolitical risks, internal security, and diplomatic responses.
- **Panel 2 – Economy, Finance and Supply Chains:** Convenor — DEA Secretary Anuradha Thakur. Monitors export-import disruptions, supply chain bottlenecks, and financial market stability.
- **Panel 3 – Energy Security (Petroleum, LNG and Power):** Convenor — Petroleum Secretary **Neeraj Mittal**. Includes heads of PSUs like ONGC, IOC, and GAIL. Focuses on uninterrupted fuel supply, price volatility, and strategic reserves.
- **Panel 4 – Fertilisers and Agriculture Inputs:** Convenor — Fertilisers Secretary Rajat Kumar Mishra. Addresses disruptions in fertiliser production, which is heavily dependent on energy inputs, to safeguard food security.
- **Panel 5 – Prices and Essential Commodities:** Convenor — Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare. Tasked with ensuring price stability and availability of essential goods to control inflationary pressures.
- **Panel 6 – Transport, Logistics and Trade Routes:** Convenor — Ports, Shipping and Waterways Secretary **Vijay Kumar**. Covers disruptions in shipping, ports, aviation, railways, and road transport.
- **Panel 7 – Information, Communication and Public Engagement:** Convenor — I&B Secretary **Sanjay Jaju**. Manages accurate dissemination of information, counters misinformation, and maintains public confidence.

- **India's Energy Preparedness:** India has diversified crude oil imports from 27 countries to 41 countries. Strategic petroleum reserves exceed 5.3 million tonnes, with work underway to build reserves exceeding 6.5 million tonnes.

### Jharkhand Leader Kalpana Soren Gets International Honour

**In the News:** Kalpana Soren, MLA from Gandey, Jharkhand, and wife of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, was conferred the 'Women Empowerment Trailblazer Award' at the BRICS CCI WE Annual Women Summit and Felicitation 2026, held at the Hyatt Regency, New Delhi.

#### Key Points:

- **Award:** Women Empowerment Trailblazer Award, presented by the Women Empowerment Vertical of the BRICS Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI).
- **Venue:** Hyatt Regency, New Delhi, during the BRICS CCI WE Annual Women Summit and Felicitation 2026.
- **Reason for Honour:** Recognised for her efforts in advancing women-led development, grassroots empowerment, and inclusive growth, particularly in rural and tribal areas of Jharkhand.
- **Key Highlights from Her Address:** She stated the award belongs to every woman contributing to society. She highlighted the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and local enterprises in strengthening women's economic independence. She also referenced her visit to London, where she interacted with students from Jharkhand studying at institutions such as Oxford University.
- **About BRICS CCI WE Summit:** The BRICS Chamber of Commerce and Industry Women Empowerment Summit serves as a global platform to discuss women's leadership and development. The 2026 edition was attended by prominent personalities including Meenakshi Lekhi, Raksha Khadse, Abhishek Singh (NIC Director General), Shabana Azmi, Bhumi Pednekar, and several international delegates.
- **CM Hemant Soren's Reaction:** Chief Minister Hemant Soren congratulated Kalpana Soren via X, calling the honour a global recognition of "Nari Shakti" (Women's Power) and terming it an inspiration for countless women.
- **About Kalpana Soren:** She is the MLA from Gandey constituency in Jharkhand and wife of Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

### Operation Urja Suraksha Explained: India's Naval Mission for Energy Security

**In the News:** The Indian Navy launched Operation Urja Suraksha, a strategic naval mission to escort and safeguard India-bound energy shipments — crude oil, LPG, and LNG — through the Strait of Hormuz amid rising tensions in West Asia, including an Iranian blockade of the strait.

#### Key Points:

- **Operation Launch:** The Indian Navy launched Operation Urja Suraksha with calibrated precision and minimal publicity to ensure uninterrupted and secure movement of Indian-flagged vessels carrying critical energy supplies through the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz into the Arabian Sea.
- **Ships Identified:** All India-bound vessels transporting LNG, LPG, and crude oil have been identified for protected transit. Nearly 20 vessels were reported stuck due to conflict-related risks in the region.
- **Naval Assets Deployed:** More than five frontline warships — including destroyers and frigates — have been deployed in the Gulf of Oman to escort cargo vessels once they exit the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Vessels Escorted So Far:** Four LPG carriers — Pine Gas, Jag Vasant, Shivalik, and Nanda Devi — carrying a cumulative ~92,000 tonnes of cooking gas, and one crude oil tanker, Jag Laadki, have been escorted successfully.
- **Scope Beyond Escort:** Naval operations extend beyond escort duties — warships provide real-time monitoring, route-specific navigational guidance, and layered maritime security until vessels reach safer waters in the Arabian Sea.
- **Strategic Importance of Strait of Hormuz:** The Strait of Hormuz is a critical maritime chokepoint connecting the Persian Gulf to global markets. A large share of India's crude oil and gas imports transits through this route, making any disruption a direct threat to fuel supply, prices, industry, and economic stability.

### Supreme Court Panel Urges Union Government to Withdraw Transgender Rights Amendment Bill 2026

**In the News:** A Supreme Court-appointed Advisory Committee headed by former Delhi High Court judge Justice Asha Menon wrote to Union Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar, urging the withdrawal of the Transgender Persons

(Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, stating that its provisions violate the Supreme Court's landmark 2014 NALSA judgment. The Lok Sabha had passed the Bill on March 24, 2026, amid an Opposition walkout.

#### Key Points:

- **The Amendment Bill:** Introduced by Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar on March 13, 2026, the Bill proposes sweeping changes to the existing Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. Its most significant change is the removal of the right to gender self-identification — a right established by the Supreme Court in the 2014 NALSA v. Union of India judgment.
- **Key Proposed Changes:** The Bill replaces self-identification with a state-controlled medical certification process, requiring individuals to be assessed by a medical board headed by a Chief Medical Officer. It also narrows the legal definition of "transgender person," restricting recognition to specific socio-cultural groups (such as hijras and kinnars) and individuals with specific congenital biological variations — effectively excluding trans-men, trans-women, and non-binary persons.
- **SC-Appointed Advisory Committee's Response:** The Advisory Committee, constituted by the Supreme Court in October 2025, held a special meeting on March 20, 2026, at the request of one of its members. It passed a resolution declaring the Bill's provisions contrary to the NALSA judgment and formally requested the Social Justice Minister to withdraw the Bill. It also called for widespread community consultation before any further amendments to the 2019 Act.
- **Why Was the Committee Formed?** The Supreme Court constituted this committee while hearing the case of Delhi-based transwoman Jane Kaushik, who faced workplace discrimination and was denied employment as a teacher by private schools in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat due to her transgender identity. The Court noted that despite mandatory language, the 2019 Act's provisions had remained "mere aspirations on paper."
- **Composition of the Committee:** The panel is chaired by Justice Asha Menon and includes trans-rights activists Akkai Padmashali, Vyjayanti Vasanta Mogli, and Grace Banu; academic Sourav Mandal (Jindal Global Law School); Air Cmde (Dr.) Sanjay Sharma (Retd.), CEO of the Association for Transgender Health in India; researchers Nithya Rajshekhar and Aparna Mehrotra; and Senior Advocate Jayna Kothari as Amicus Curiae.

#### Second Wife Not Eligible for Pension: Delhi High Court

**In the News:** The Delhi High Court recently ruled that a second wife is not entitled to family pension, even if the first legally wedded wife has since died. The judgment reaffirms that pensionary benefits are strictly governed by legal marital status under applicable service rules, particularly the Pension Regulations for the Army, 1961.

#### Key Points:

- **The Core Ruling:** A Division Bench of the Delhi High Court held that only a legally wedded spouse is eligible for family pension. A marriage contracted during the subsistence of a first marriage is void from its very inception under law, and does not gain legal validity upon the subsequent death of the first wife.
- **Background of the Case:** The petitioner claimed to be the widow of a deceased army personnel and sought family pension. She argued she was unaware of her husband's prior marriage at the time of her own, had lived with him for several years, and had children from the relationship. However, the court established that the first marriage was never legally dissolved, the first wife had survived the deceased, and had received family pension until her own death.
- **Legal Provisions Invoked:** The Court relied on the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 — specifically Section 5 (conditions for a valid Hindu marriage) and Section 11 (which declares a second marriage void if the first spouse is alive). It reiterated that a void marriage does not confer the legal status of "wife" upon the second partner.
- **Key Legal Principle — No Retrospective Validity:** The Court clearly stated that the death of the first wife does not retrospectively validate a void marriage. Pension entitlement, once vested in the lawful widow, does not transfer to another claimant simply because circumstances change after the deceased's death.
- **Governing Framework — Army Pension Regulations, 1961:** The Court underscored that family pension for armed forces personnel is governed by the Pension Regulations for the Army, 1961, under which only a legally wedded spouse qualifies as an eligible beneficiary. Service rules strictly define who can claim such benefits.

#### Lok Sabha Passes Finance Bill 2026 with Amendments



**In the News:** The Lok Sabha passed the Finance Bill 2026 by a voice vote, approving 32 amendments proposed by the government while rejecting those moved by Opposition members. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while replying to the debate, stated that India is "riding on the reform express" — driven by conviction, clarity, confidence, and commitment rather than compulsion.

#### Key Points:

- **What is the Finance Bill?** The Finance Bill is a crucial piece of legislation that gives effect to the taxation proposals outlined in the Union Budget. Its passage by Parliament is essential to formally complete the Union Budget process. After Lok Sabha approval, the Bill now moves to the Rajya Sabha for final clearance, completing the Union Budget 2026–27 process.
- **Key Fiscal Targets — Union Budget 2026–27:** The total expenditure is set at ₹53.47 lakh crore, marking a 7.7% increase over the current financial year. The fiscal deficit target for FY27 is 4.3% of GDP, slightly lower than the revised estimate of 4.4% for FY26. The government aims to balance fiscal consolidation with continued support for economic growth and infrastructure development.
- **FM's Defence on Fiscal Management:** Sitharaman highlighted that India's fiscal deficit has been reduced from 9.3% of GDP during the Covid-19 period to current levels. She also alleged that deficit figures during the 2008–09 global financial crisis were understated by shifting liabilities to oil marketing companies.
- **Oil Bonds Issue:** The Finance Minister emphasised that the government has been repaying liabilities from oil bonds issued during a previous regime — instruments used to compensate oil companies without raising fuel prices directly. The total outstanding oil bond debt inherited was ₹1.3 lakh crore, with ₹1.43 lakh crore repaid between 2014 and 2024, including ₹44,650 crore as principal. These repayments, she noted, have reduced funds available for developmental expenditure.

## 1. India Reports 24,700 Maternal Deaths in 2023: Lancet Study Highlights High Mortality Burden

**In the News:** A new global analysis published in *The Lancet Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Women's Health* has estimated that India recorded **24,700 maternal deaths in 2023**. India's **maternal mortality ratio** was estimated at **116 deaths per 100,000 live births** in the same year. The study also noted that India has made substantial long-term progress since 1990, but the pace of decline has slowed in recent years. The findings place India among the countries with the highest maternal deaths in absolute numbers.

#### Key Pointers

- Maternal mortality refers to the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy from pregnancy-related causes. The Lancet-linked global analysis estimated 24,700 maternal deaths in India in 2023.
- India's maternal mortality ratio in 2023 was estimated at 116 per 100,000 live births. The same study noted a major decline from around 508 per 100,000 live births in 1990, indicating a long-term reduction of nearly 80 percent.
- The global study estimated about 240,000 maternal deaths worldwide in 2023. It also stated that progress in reducing maternal mortality slowed between 2015 and 2023 compared with the earlier period from 2000 to 2015.
- More than 100 countries still remain above the SDG target for maternal mortality. The SDG target is fewer than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, which shows that maternal health remains a major international public-health challenge.

## 2. UV Index Explained: The Hidden Health Risk Rising in India

**In the News:** Several Indian cities have recently recorded **high to extreme ultraviolet radiation levels**. Bengaluru reported a **UV Index of 13**, which falls in the **extreme** category under WHO standards. WHO states that the UV Index indicates the level of ultraviolet radiation and the potential danger of sun exposure. The issue has acquired importance alongside forecasts of an **above-average summer** in India.

#### Key Pointers

- The UV Index is a standard measure of the intensity of ultraviolet radiation at the Earth's surface. WHO states that the higher the UV Index, the greater the possibility of damage to the skin and eyes, and the less time it takes for harm to occur.

- WHO's broad UV Index categories are low (0–2), moderate (3–5), high (6–7), very high (8–10), and extreme (11 or more). Sun protection is recommended when the UV Index is 3 or above.
- Bengaluru recently touched a UV Index of 13. Such readings indicate severe ultraviolet exposure risk even when temperature alone may not appear exceptionally high.
- Excessive UV exposure can cause sunburn, eye damage, premature skin ageing, and increased long-term skin-cancer risk. WHO also notes that overexposure during childhood and adolescence contributes significantly to later skin-cancer risk.
- India is likely to experience above-average temperatures during the March–May period. The overlap of high heat and high ultraviolet exposure increases the public-health importance of UV awareness and sun-protection measures.

### 3. Meghalaya Joins Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0 Reform Framework

**In the News:** Meghalaya has become the **12th State** to sign a **reform-linked Memorandum of Understanding** with the Union Government under **Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0**. The agreement marks Meghalaya's formal entry into the new implementation framework of the restructured mission. Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0 was approved by the Union Cabinet on **10 March 2026**. The framework places greater emphasis on sustainable rural drinking-water service delivery and decentralised management.

#### Key Pointers

- Jal Jeevan Mission 2.0 is the restructured second phase of the rural tap-water programme. It was approved on 10 March 2026 with an enhanced total outlay of ₹8.69 lakh crore and an additional central share of ₹1.51 lakh crore.
- Meghalaya became the 12th State to sign the reform-linked MoU under JJM 2.0 on 27 March 2026. The PIB release described this as a significant step toward an outcome-oriented and service-driven rural water-supply model.
- The restructured mission emphasises community ownership, sustainable operations, and decentralised management. Gram Panchayats and Village Water & Sanitation Committees are expected to play a larger role in operating in-village water systems.
- The national timeline of Jal Jeevan Mission has now been extended to December 2028. This extension is intended to complete universal rural tap-water coverage along with stronger long-term service delivery.
- Meghalaya has already reported substantial progress in rural tap-water coverage. The State government stated that rural household tap-water coverage has reached 83.59 percent.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Asphyxiation an island nation : Blockade on Cuba

**In the News:** Cuba is facing a severe energy and humanitarian crisis as the US blockade has cut off the island nation's fuel supplies. Cuba's entire electricity grid collapsed, leaving approximately 10 million people without power. A Russian government-owned tanker, the Anatoly Kolodkin, carrying an estimated 7,30,000 barrels of crude oil, is heading towards Cuba in defiance of the US energy blockade, potentially arriving as early as March 23, 2026.

#### Key Points:

- **Cuba's Energy Crisis:** Cuba's dependence on oil is structural — it accounts for 83% of total power generation, while oil products make up 56% of total energy consumption across industry, transport, agriculture, and households. The country imports roughly 80% of its food, making prolonged blackouts catastrophic as they interrupt refrigeration vital for preserving perishables. The power network has been partially collapsing since October 2024, with three national grid failures in the past four months alone.
- **Collapse of Fuel Supply Chains:** Cuba's fuel supplies were historically dependent on Venezuelan oil under the oil-for-doctors scheme instituted by Hugo Chavez. In 2022, Venezuela supplied 75% of Cuba's oil imports, dropping to 58% in 2023 as Mexico emerged as a key supplier with 31%. Venezuela's supply fell from 46,500 barrels per day in December 2025 to zero following the abduction of Nicolas Maduro in early January 2026. After Trump's January 29, 2026 executive order, Mexico also halted shipments, leaving Cuba with no energy supply.



- **US Blockade and Trump's Actions:** President Trump signed an executive order threatening punitive tariffs on any country selling oil to Cuba. Trump further explicitly threatened to "take" the island. US policy towards Cuba in the second Trump administration is fronted by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, son of Cuban immigrants, who has openly called for regime change in Havana.
- **Six Decades of US Economic Coercion:** The US embargo on Cuba began in 1962 following the Cuban Revolution and nationalisation of industries. Key milestones include the Torricelli Act (1992), which prohibited foreign subsidiaries of US firms from trading with Cuba, and the Helms-Burton Act (1996), which codified the embargo into law and extended sanctions to foreign companies doing business in Cuba. The first Trump administration redesignated Cuba as a "State Sponsor of Terrorism" in January 2021. Cuban authorities documented over 1,000 instances of foreign banks refusing services between 2021 and 2024.
- **Humanitarian Consequences:** The grid collapse has left Cuba with few cars on roads, most airlines suspending flights, Canadian company Sherritt International shuttering nickel mining operations, state offices closing, and schools partly suspending classes. Ordinary Cubans are struggling with spoiled food, stifling heat, and sleepless children.
- **Russia's Role:** The Kremlin has expressed readiness to provide assistance to Cuba. The Anatoly Kolodkin, a Russian government-owned tanker, is headed to Cuba with 7,30,000 barrels of crude oil. However, analysts note this would give Cuba only "breathing room of no more than 30 days" due to Cuba's highly inefficient refineries.
- **Cuba's Negotiations with Washington:** Cuba recently admitted it was in discussions with Washington and indicated openness to economic changes, including allowing expatriate Cubans and foreign companies to participate in key sectors of development. However, Rubio said the proposed changes were insufficient, and US negotiators were reportedly demanding the resignation of President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

### Why is Israel attacking Lebanon

**In the News:** Israel announced the launch of a ground offensive in Lebanon against Hezbollah, as the US-Israeli war on Iran entered its fourth week. Israel has carried out massive air strikes in southern Lebanon and southern Beirut, killing at least 1,000 people — including 118 children and 40 health workers — and displacing approximately one million people, raising fears of a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

#### Key Points:

- **Immediate Trigger:** In February 2026, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in a joint Israeli-American air strike. In retaliation, Hezbollah fired hundreds of rockets into northern Israel. Israel responded with air strikes, followed by the ground offensive launched on March 16, 2026.
- **What is Hezbollah?:** Hezbollah is a Shia militant group and political party in Lebanon with close ties to Iran. It was formed in the early 1980s in response to Israel's occupation of Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war. Iran has provided money, weapons, and training to Hezbollah since its inception. Israel, the US, and Western partners designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation.
- **History of Israel-Hezbollah Conflict:** Israel has carried out multiple military campaigns in Lebanon over decades. In 1978 and 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to push Palestinian militias northward. In 2000, Israeli troops were forced to withdraw from Lebanon due to Hezbollah's guerrilla attacks — celebrated by Hezbollah as the first Arab victory against Israel. In 2006, Israel attacked Lebanon again to dismantle Hezbollah's military infrastructure but agreed to a ceasefire after a month-long campaign.
- **November 2024 Ceasefire and Its Breakdown:** A ceasefire was reached between Hezbollah and Israel in November 2024 after Israel's campaign that included the assassination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in September 2024 and the pager explosion attacks targeting Hezbollah's mid-level commanders. Despite the ceasefire, Israel continued near-daily air strikes on Lebanon, and the latest escalation began when Hezbollah fired rockets into Israel after Khamenei's killing.
- **Israel's Military Objectives:** Israel has declared it wants to dismantle Hezbollah's military capabilities, push Hezbollah away from southern Lebanon, and create a buffer zone inside Lebanese territory. Israel has issued evacuation orders for all of southern Lebanon, bombed bridges over the Litani River to cut off Hezbollah's supplies and reinforcements, and ordered demolition of homes in border villages — following a similar approach used in Gaza.

- **Hezbollah's Current Strength and Response:** Despite being significantly weakened by the loss of top leadership, the fall of Assad's government in Syria (which cut the Iran-Hezbollah land bridge), and sustained Israeli strikes, Hezbollah has fired over 1,000 rockets and drones at Israel since March 2, 2026. It is offering stiff resistance in hilltop towns of southern Lebanon, particularly in Khiam, a high plateau overlooking the Hula Valley.

### U.S. eases curbs on Iran Oil

**In the News:** The United States removed sanctions on the purchase of Iranian oil at sea for 30 days, as the West Asia conflict disrupted global energy supplies. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent announced that the temporary waiver would bring approximately 140 million barrels of Iranian oil to global markets. India, which imports over 88% of its crude oil needs, is seen as one of the potential major beneficiaries of this move.

#### Key Points:

- **Background — West Asia Crisis:** In response to the US and Israel's offensive that began on February 28, 2026, Iran effectively choked vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz, which accounts for one-fifth of global oil and LNG flows. Its effective closure, along with attacks on energy infrastructure, caused a surge in global oil prices. Around 2.5–2.7 million barrels per day (bpd) of India's crude imports transit the Strait of Hormuz.
- **The US Sanctions Waiver:** The US removed sanctions on the purchase of Iranian oil already at sea for 30 days, unlocking approximately 140 million barrels of oil for global markets. Treasury Secretary Bessent stated the move would use "Iranian barrels against Tehran to keep prices down" as part of Operation Epic Fury. The US had previously announced a similar month-long waiver on sanctioned Russian crude at sea.
- **Current Iranian Oil Situation:** As of March 2026, over 90% of Iranian oil exports were going to China. Kpler estimates roughly 170 million barrels of Iranian crude are currently on water, including floating storage and cargoes in transit. A portion of these volumes remains unsold, representing potential incremental supply if sanctions ease or enforcement weakens.
- **India's Oil Import Dependence:** India imports over 88% of its crude oil requirements and is the world's fourth-largest refiner. More than 60% of its crude imports come from the Gulf — primarily Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE — with half of these travelling through the now-disrupted Strait of Hormuz. India's Russian oil imports in March 2026 surged to 1.8 million bpd, up from 1 million bpd in February, due to the Strait's closure.
- **India-Iran Oil History:** India was historically a major buyer of Iranian crude. Imports peaked at around 14.4% of total crude imports in 2009-10 (22.1 million tonnes). In 2016-17, Iran was India's third-largest oil supplier, supplying 27.1 million tonnes. India ceased all Iranian oil imports from May 2019 after the expiry of US sanctions waivers. Major Indian buyers were Essar Oil (now Nayara Energy) and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals (MRPL).

### China Overtakes Netherlands as India's No. 3 Export Destination

**In the News:** China has overtaken the **Netherlands** to become **India's third-largest export destination** in **February 2026**. This development has drawn attention because it reflects a notable shift in India's export geography even as overall merchandise exports remained weak during the month. According to current trade reporting based on **Commerce Department data**, exports to China rose sharply while exports to several other top destinations contracted.

#### Key Pointers

- In February 2026, China became India's third-largest export destination, behind only the United States and the United Arab Emirates. This means the Netherlands slipped out of the third position. The shift was reported on the basis of official commerce data.
- Exports from India to China rose by 32.4% year-on-year to about \$1.67 billion in February 2026. Reports indicate that this rise was helped by a low base and by stronger shipments in sectors such as electronics and marine products. This made China's rise in the ranking possible.
- India's overall merchandise exports in February 2026 were \$36.61 billion, slightly lower than a year earlier. The official trade release put the year-on-year decline at about 0.81%. So, China's rise happened despite a generally soft export month.

- The United States remained India's largest export destination, while the UAE stayed second. However, shipments to both these major markets weakened in February, which made the reordering among top destinations more visible. This is why the China development attracted policy and exam relevance.
- The broader trade context remained mixed, because India's total exports of goods and services for February 2026 were estimated at \$76.13 billion, while merchandise trade stayed under pressure. This shows that destination-specific changes can happen even in a slower export environment.

### **Strait of Hormuz Crisis: 22-Nation Coalition Moves to Secure Oil Supply**

**In the News:** The **Strait of Hormuz crisis** has moved to the centre of global attention because disruptions in the waterway have threatened a major share of the world's oil and gas movement. Current reporting says a **22-country coalition** is taking shape to help secure shipping, and formal moves for **safe maritime corridors** and proposals for **multinational naval coalitions** to protect commercial traffic.

#### **Key Pointers**

- The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints, carrying about 20% of global oil transit. The present crisis sharply disrupted shipping through the passage. This is why the issue has become a major international economic concern.
- Current coverage says a coalition of 22 countries, including several U.S. allies, is forming to secure the Strait and restore safe passage. Reporting has indicated a leading role for the United Kingdom in this emerging effort. The coalition idea is tied to protection of shipping rather than a formal NATO operation.
- Several countries, including Bahrain, Japan, Panama, Singapore, and the UAE, proposed a safe maritime corridor at the IMO to evacuate stranded seafarers, while Bahrain also pushed a U.N. Security Council draft calling for voluntary multinational coalitions to protect commercial shipping.
- The crisis has already affected energy markets and shipping operations. Tanker traffic through Hormuz had collapsed sharply, while energy firms such as ADNOC Gas adjusted operations because of the disruption. Brent crude prices also spiked during the crisis before easing somewhat.
- Asian economies are especially vulnerable because they depend heavily on Middle Eastern oil and LNG moving through Hormuz. Singapore warned Asia faced a serious crisis, and Japan announced a major release from reserves as part of a wider IEA-coordinated effort. This shows the global and particularly Asian significance of the chokepoint.

### **Elon Musk Unveils Terafab AI Chip Manufacturing Project**

**In the News:** Elon Musk has unveiled Terafab, a new advanced semiconductor manufacturing project linked to Tesla, SpaceX, and xAI. The project involves building two advanced chip factories in Austin, Texas, with one aimed at Tesla vehicles and Optimus robots, and the other aimed at AI data centres in space. The announcement is in the news because it signals Musk's attempt at deeper vertical integration in the AI and semiconductor ecosystem.

#### **Key Pointers:**

- Terafab is the name given to a planned pair of advanced chip-manufacturing facilities in Austin, Texas. Tesla and SpaceX would jointly build these facilities. The project is tied to Musk's wider AI and robotics ambitions.
- The two factories are designed for different purposes. One factory will make chips for Tesla vehicles and Optimus humanoid robots, while the other will produce chips for AI data centres in space, built to function in harsher conditions. This makes the project unusual even by semiconductor-industry standards.
- Musk said the project is necessary because future chip demand may exceed current global supply. Reuters noted that he argued existing production from firms such as Samsung, TSMC, and Micron would not be enough for the scale of demand envisioned by his companies. The project is therefore also a supply-security move. When fully developed, Terafab is expected to support one terawatt of annual computing capacity.
- The project also indicates increasing convergence among Musk's companies—Tesla, SpaceX, and xAI. Reuters linked Terafab to the broader strategy around AI infrastructure, while other current reporting described it as a vertically

integrated push to reduce dependence on outside chipmakers. For exams, remember the key linkage: AI chips, Austin, and multi-company integration.

### The Global Terrorism Index 2026

**In the News:** The **Global Terrorism Index 2026** has been released by the **Institute for Economics & Peace**, providing a global assessment of terrorism trends. The report is in the news because it records a major fall in terrorism deaths worldwide, while also showing sharp deterioration in a few countries and continued concentration of terrorism in specific regions. It also highlights that the **Sahel remains the global epicentre of terrorism**. The report has particular relevance for India because it also ranks countries and tracks their score changes year to year.

#### Key Pointers

- The GTI 2026 is the 13th edition of the index. It ranks 163 countries and is designed to cover 99.7% of the world's population, making it one of the best-known global terrorism datasets.
- Global terrorism deaths fell by 28% to 5,582 in 2025, while attacks declined by nearly 22% to 2,944. The report says 81 countries improved and only 19 countries deteriorated, which was the lowest number of deteriorations on record.
- Pakistan ranked 1st in GTI 2026 with a 2025 GTI score of 8.574. India ranked 13th, with a 2025 GTI score of 6.428, showing a modest improvement in its score from the previous year.
- Sub-Saharan Africa remained the epicentre of terrorism, and the Sahel accounted for more than half of all terrorism-related deaths globally. Six of the ten most impacted countries were in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Islamic State and its affiliates remained the deadliest terrorist group in 2025. The four deadliest groups identified in the report were Islamic State, JNIM, TTP, and al-Shabaab, with TTP being the only one among them to record an increase in deaths.

### Philippines Declares Energy Emergency Amid Iran Conflict

**In the News:** Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. declared a national energy emergency in response to the U.S.-Israel war on Iran, citing the "imminent danger" posed to the country's energy supply as fuel prices more than doubled since hostilities began on February 28.

#### Key Points:

- **Trigger:** The U.S.-Israel war on Iran, which began on February 28, 2026, disrupted global energy supply chains, causing diesel and petrol prices in the Philippines to more than double.
- **Fuel Supply Status:** As of the declaration, the Philippines had approximately 45 days of fuel supply remaining based on current consumption levels.
- **Emergency Declaration:** Valid for one year, it authorises the government to directly procure fuel, pay advance contract amounts, and act against hoarding, profiteering, and manipulation of petroleum supplies.
- **First Country:** The Philippines became the first country to declare a national energy emergency in the context of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran.
- **Oil Procurement Efforts:** The government is working to procure 1 million barrels of oil from countries within and outside Southeast Asia and is seeking U.S. exemptions to potentially purchase oil from sanctioned countries, including Iran and Venezuela.
- **New Tax Law:** Marcos signed a law allowing temporary suspension or reduction of excise tax on petroleum products when the average Dubai crude oil price reaches or exceeds \$80 per barrel for a month.
- **Government Relief Measures:** A 5,000 peso (\$83) subsidy was announced for motorcycle taxi and public transport workers. Free bus rides were provided to students and workers in some cities. A four-day work week was implemented for civil servants to conserve fuel.
- **Transport Strike:** Transport union coalition Piston led a two-day strike from March 27, demanding scrapping of fuel taxes, rollback of oil prices, state price controls, and higher wages.

### Iran's Ceasefire Conditions After Trump's 5-Day Halt



**In the News:** Iran rejected a 15-point ceasefire proposal backed by the Trump administration and issued a counterproposal with five conditions to end the ongoing war, which began on February 28 with the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

**Key Points:**

- **Background of the Conflict:** The U.S. and Israel launched the war on February 28, 2026, following the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several other Iranian leaders. A second round of nuclear negotiations was held in Geneva on February 27, a day before strikes began, which were deemed progressive but resulted in no deal.
- **Trump's 15-Point Ceasefire Proposal:** The U.S. proposed a ceasefire offering sanctions relief in exchange for Iran abandoning its nuclear programme, a conditional reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, and rollbacks on Iran's missile capabilities.
- **Iran's Five Conditions to End the War:** Tehran demanded a complete end to U.S. and Israeli "aggression," a guarantee against recurrence of war, payment of war damages and reparations, an end to the war across all fronts including all resistance groups, and full Iranian sovereignty over the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Iran's Military Actions:** Tehran continued striking targets in the region, hitting Kuwait International Airport and other Persian Gulf targets. Iran's Revolutionary Guards also launched fresh attacks on Tel Aviv, Kiryat Shmona in Israel, and U.S. bases in Kuwait, Jordan, and Bahrain.
- **Israel's Retaliation:** Israel struck the Iranian capital Tehran on March 26, targeting infrastructure across the city. Strikes reportedly hit a residential area, with rescuers searching through rubble.
- **U.S. Military Posture:** White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt stated the U.S. was close to meeting the core objectives of "Operation Epic Fury", focused on decimating Iran's navy and reopening the Strait of Hormuz. The Pentagon is also preparing to deploy approximately 2,000 troops from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division to the Middle East.

### Loni Overtakes Delhi as World's Most Polluted City India Faces Deepening Air Crisis

**In the News:** According to the 2025 World Air Quality Report released by IQAir — a Swiss air quality technology company — Loni, an urban cluster near Ghaziabad in the NCR, has overtaken Delhi to become the world's most polluted city, signalling a deepening air quality crisis across India.

**Key Points:**

- **About the Report:** The 2025 World Air Quality Report by IQAir revealed that Loni recorded an alarming annual average PM2.5 concentration of  $112.5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  — more than 22 times the WHO's recommended safe limit. PM2.5 refers to fine particulate matter small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, posing severe long-term health risks to residents.
- **NCR as a Continuous Pollution Belt:** For decades, Delhi symbolised India's air pollution crisis, but Loni's emergence at the top of global rankings signals that the problem has expanded well beyond the capital. Cities like Loni, Delhi, Noida, and Faridabad are now collectively forming a continuous pollution hotspot across the NCR, making it clear that tackling pollution in Delhi alone is no longer sufficient.
- **Primary Causes of Pollution in Loni:** Loni's alarming pollution levels stem from a combination of unregulated industrial emissions, heavy vehicular traffic and outdated fuel standards, construction dust with poor enforcement of dust control norms, open waste burning and biomass combustion, and seasonal stubble burning in neighbouring states. Gaps in real-time monitoring and weak regulatory enforcement allow pollution sources to go largely unchecked.
- **Health Impacts:** Continuous exposure to toxic air causes serious health conditions including respiratory diseases like asthma and bronchitis, increased risk of heart disease and stroke, lung infections, reduced immunity, developmental issues in children, and higher risk of lung cancer. Even healthy individuals in severely polluted areas like Loni can experience breathlessness, throat irritation, severe headaches, and chronic fatigue.

### Cuba Blackout 2026: Causes, Impact & Ongoing Power Crisis Explained



**In the News:** Cuba's national power grid collapsed for the third time in a single month, plunging the entire nation of over 10 million people into darkness. The state-run electricity authority confirmed a total disconnection of the National Electrical System, with restoration efforts prioritising hospitals and water systems.

**Key Points:**

- **About the Crisis:** Cuba's recurring blackouts are not sudden incidents but the result of long-standing structural failures in its energy system. The country's ageing electricity infrastructure has been deteriorating for decades, with many power plants operating well beyond their intended lifespan, making the grid highly vulnerable to repeated system-wide collapses.
- **Key Causes:** Cuba produces only about 40% of its domestic fuel needs and relies heavily on oil imports, which have been severely disrupted by a US fuel blockade cutting off foreign oil supplies needed to keep power stations running. Combined with outdated power plants, limited domestic fuel production, and irregular imports from partner nations, these factors have created a fragile energy system that collapses frequently under pressure.
- **Geopolitical Context:** The crisis is deeply intertwined with US-Cuba tensions. Since the US seizure of former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on January 3, President Donald Trump has signalled interest in the removal of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel as a condition for lifting the fuel embargo. Trump has also suggested a possible "friendly takeover" of Cuba, while Cuba's Deputy Foreign Minister insisted that Cuba's political system and leadership are not subject to negotiation with the United States.
- **International Response:** A coalition of international socialist groups arrived in Havana with aid including solar panels, food kits, and medicines. The "Nuestra America" convoy — a flotilla of aid departing from Mexico — was delayed due to rough sea conditions but was expected to arrive at Havana's port. Initial phases of bilateral talks between the US and Cuban governments have also been confirmed by President Díaz-Canel, though their progress remains unclear.

### **Strait of Hormuz Blockade 2026 Who Is Allowed Through and Why Ship Traffic Crashed**

**In the News:** Since the outbreak of the West Asia conflict on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2026, ship traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has dropped by nearly 95% — from normal levels to just 138 ships — raising serious global concerns over energy supply and oil prices. Iran has adopted a selective approach, allowing only designated "non-hostile" nations to pass through the strait.

**Key Points:**

- **About the Strait of Hormuz:** The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most strategically vital waterways in the world, connecting the Persian Gulf to international markets. It is only about 33 km wide at its narrowest point and handles nearly 20% of global oil supply along with a significant share of global LNG trade. It lies between key oil-producing nations — Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia — making it a critical global energy chokepoint.
- **Why Only Certain Countries Are Allowed Passage:** Iran has adopted a selective passage policy, allowing only nations it considers "non-hostile" to transit the strait. Countries like India, China, Pakistan, and Thailand have managed to secure passage through diplomatic coordination and strategic neutrality, as they maintain relatively balanced relations with Iran. However, the definition of "non-hostile" remains unclear, creating significant uncertainty for global shipping companies.
- **Country-Wise Situation:** India has emerged as a key beneficiary, with several Indian tankers carrying essential fuel supplies successfully crossing the strait. China secured passage with vessels reportedly paying a transit fee, reflecting Beijing's strong economic ties with Iran. Thailand secured passage after diplomatic engagement, while Pakistan's case has been mixed — one vessel passed but another was denied entry due to non-compliance with Iranian protocols. Turkey has managed passage, while Japan is still awaiting clearance despite ongoing diplomatic talks.
- **Impact on Global Trade and Energy Security:** The sharp decline in vessel movement has put global oil supply chains under severe stress, contributing to rising fuel prices and inflation worldwide. Shipping companies face increased risks from vessel attacks and unclear navigation rules, while insurance costs for ships operating in the Gulf have surged, further raising transportation costs. For oil-import-dependent nations like India, the blockade poses a serious economic challenge.

- **India's Response — Operation Urja Suraksha:** To counter the disruption, India launched Operation Urja Suraksha, deploying naval destroyers and frigates to escort India-bound energy vessels — carrying crude oil, LPG, and LNG — safely through the Strait of Hormuz into the Arabian Sea, ensuring uninterrupted energy supply chains for the country.

### WTO conference begins: What's at stake for the world body, and for India?

**In the News:** The WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) began on March 26, 2026, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, amid a global trade crisis triggered by the Trump-led US administration's aggressive tariff policies and assault on trade multilateralism. WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has called it a 'turning point ministerial'.

#### Key Points:

- **About MC14:** The Ministerial Conference is the WTO's highest decision-making body, meeting once every two years, empowered to make all decisions on WTO law and chart the organisation's future. MC14 runs from March 26–29, 2026, in Yaoundé, Cameroon. It comes at a time when the WTO faces a serious crisis of relevance amid rising unilateralism and the retreat of trade multilateralism globally.
- **E-Commerce Moratorium:** The moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions — covering services from streaming to e-books — has been renewed every two years since 1998 and is set to expire on March 31, 2026. Digital trade has grown from under \$1 trillion in 1998 to over \$16 trillion by 2025, with digitally delivered services representing 56% of global services exports. Developed nations want the moratorium made permanent, but India, Indonesia, and South Africa oppose this, arguing it restricts their ability to collect revenue and undermines future policy space.
- **Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement:** A China-backed plurilateral deal supported by 128 countries, aimed at improving foreign direct investment flows among WTO members. India opposes it, arguing it contradicts the WTO's traditional consensus-based multilateral decision-making framework. Strategically, 98 of the 128 IFD participants are also members of China's Belt and Road Initiative, raising significant geo-economic concerns for India.
- **WTO Reforms and SDT:** The US is pushing to rethink the MFN principle, calling it no longer a bedrock of the multilateral trading system, and seeking to weaken Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) provisions that grant developing nations like India, China, Brazil, and Indonesia special rights. Developing countries that benefit from these principles are expected to strongly oppose such efforts at MC14. Experts warn that if MC14 fails to strengthen the WTO, it will represent a victory for US unilateralism and be detrimental to the developing world.

### PM Modi to Attend G7 Summit 2026 in France

**In the News:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to attend the G7 Summit 2026 in France, scheduled from June 15 to 17 in Évian-les-Bains. His participation was confirmed following diplomatic discussions between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his French counterpart Jean-Noël Barrot at Abbaye des Vaux-de-Cernay, highlighting strong India-France strategic ties.

#### Key Points:

- **What is the G7?** The Group of Seven (G7) is an informal bloc of the world's leading industrialised nations — the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Canada — along with the European Union. Formed in 1975, it plays a crucial role in shaping global policies on economic stability, international security, climate change, and trade. Although India is not a G7 member, it has been regularly invited due to its economic strength and its role as a leader of the Global South.
- **India's Participation:** India's invitation to the G7 Summit reflects its growing influence in global governance and economic coordination. As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India serves as a bridge between developed and developing nations, contributing significantly to discussions on global growth, development financing, and climate action.
- **Diplomatic Context:** EAM Jaishankar's bilateral meeting with French Foreign Minister Barrot, held alongside the G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, reaffirmed the strong India-France strategic partnership. Both sides formally welcomed PM Modi's participation in the Évian Summit.



- **Economic Agenda:** India's role at the summit is expected to centre on addressing macroeconomic imbalances and strengthening international partnerships. Key discussions are likely to cover global supply chains, inflation management, sustainable economic growth, and India's emphasis on inclusive development and digital public infrastructure.
- **Energy Security and Strait of Hormuz:** A significant agenda item will be the evolving security situation in West Asia, particularly concerning the Strait of Hormuz — a critical maritime corridor for global oil and gas supplies. Both India and France have stressed the importance of maintaining stability and ensuring uninterrupted energy flows amid rising regional tensions, given that disruptions in this region directly impact fuel prices worldwide.
- **India's Broader Global Role:** India has participated in multiple G7 outreach sessions in recent years, consistently reinforcing its position as a key partner country. Its participation in the 2026 summit underscores its increasing relevance in shaping global responses to economic instability, geopolitical tensions, energy security, and climate transition.

### US Dollar to Feature Donald Trump's Signature for First Time in 165 Years

**In the News:** The US Treasury has announced that President Donald Trump's signature will appear on US dollar bills starting June 2026, marking the first time in 165 years — since the introduction of paper currency in 1861 — that a sitting President's signature will feature on American paper money. The decision coincides with the 250th anniversary of American Independence, known as the Semiquincentennial.

#### Key Points:

- **The Historic Change:** For the first time since 1861, US paper currency will carry the signature of a sitting President. Trump's signature will replace the traditional signature of the US Treasurer on dollar bills, appearing alongside that of Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent. The first notes to carry this change will be \$100 bills, followed by other denominations in phases.
- **Who Announced It?** US Treasurer Brandon Beach confirmed the development via a social media post, describing it as a celebratory move tied to America's 250th anniversary. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has characterised the initiative as a symbolic tribute to the country's economic strength and leadership during this period.
- **Why Now — The Semiquincentennial:** The decision is directly linked to the United States' 250th anniversary of Independence celebrations in 2026. The move is seen as part of broader efforts by the current administration to associate major national milestones and institutions with its leadership. A federal arts commission has also separately approved a 24-karat gold commemorative coin bearing Trump's image for the anniversary celebrations.
- **Legal Framework:** The US Treasury holds full authority to modify currency design under laws governing Federal Reserve notes, primarily to enhance security and prevent counterfeiting. While certain elements — such as the phrase "In God We Trust" and the use of portraits of deceased individuals — must remain unchanged, the law provides flexibility on other design aspects including signatures. Notably, rules still prohibit placing images of living individuals on coins, which is why a Trump commemorative coin has not yet materialised on regular currency.
- **Historical Significance:** Since 1861, US currency has consistently carried the signatures of the Treasurer and the Treasury Secretary, symbolising administrative accountability and continuity in financial governance. The removal of the Treasurer's signature effectively ends one of the longest-standing conventions in US monetary history — a tradition spanning 165 years.

### GDP: From the US to India, who are the economic winners and losers of US-Iran war?

**In the News:** The US-Israel military campaign against Iran, which began on February 28, 2026, has triggered a global economic shock by disrupting oil and energy flows through the Strait of Hormuz. The OECD has released an interim economic outlook assessing the impact on GDP growth and inflation across major economies, revealing a stark divide between energy-exporting and energy-importing nations.

#### Key Points:

- **The Strait of Hormuz — The Central Chokepoint:** Around 20 million barrels of oil per day pass through the Strait of Hormuz, and the disruption since February 28 has caused a severe supply shock with no excess capacity globally to fill the gap. Up to 30% of world fertiliser exports — including urea, ammonia, phosphates, and sulphur — also pass



through the Strait. LNG prices in Europe surged by as much as 50% after QatarEnergy, which ships roughly one-fifth of global LNG supply, halted production following drone strikes.

- **Oil Price Surge:** Oil prices surged from under \$70 per barrel on February 27 to a peak of nearly \$120 on March 9, before settling closer to \$90. Brent crude jumped 15% to \$83 per barrel by March 5. Prices briefly hit almost \$120 per barrel — their highest since 2022 — following the appointment of Iran's new Supreme Leader.
- **Impact on India:** India, a major energy importer, is among the hardest-hit economies. The Indian rupee has lost nearly 4% of its value against the US dollar in just one month, trading at 94.6 rupees to a dollar — far above the historical average depreciation of 2–3% per year. India's inflation, which was around 2% in 2025, is projected to spike to 5.1% in 2026, well above the RBI's target rate of 4%.
- **Losers — Energy Importing Nations:** Energy importers — most of Europe, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, India, and China — will bear the heaviest pain. The EU is expected to lose up to 0.4 percentage points of GDP growth, and the UK stands to lose 0.5 percentage points. China, India, Japan, and South Korea together account for 75% of oil and 59% of LNG imports from the region, making them acutely exposed to the disruption.
- **Impact on the US Economy:** While the US gains slightly as an energy exporter, ordinary American families still feel the pinch. Average US petrol prices rose to \$3.48 per gallon from under \$3 the previous week. Every sustained \$10-per-barrel increase in oil prices could cost a typical US household nearly \$450 annually. If oil prices remain around \$100 per barrel, the benefits of Trump's 2025 tax cuts could be wiped out for most Americans.

#### 4. UK Sets Strict Screen Time Rules for Kids: Global Push to Protect Children from Digital Harm

**In the News:** The United Kingdom has issued new national guidance on screen use for **children under five years of age**. The guidance advises **no screen time for children below two years**, except for shared interactive use such as video calls. It also recommends limiting screen time for children aged **two to five years** to about **one hour per day**. The guidance was published on **27 March 2026** and forms part of a wider international move toward stronger child digital-safety standards.

##### Key Pointers

- The guidance advises that children under two years should avoid screen use except for shared activities that encourage bonding, interaction, and conversation. This includes uses such as video calls with family members.
- For children aged two to five years, the recommended limit is about one hour a day or less. The guidance also advises keeping screens away during mealtimes and in the hour before bedtime.
- The guidance recommends slow-paced, age-appropriate content and discourages fast-paced social-media-style videos and AI tools for very young children. It also encourages co-viewing by parents and carers.
- The policy concern relates to sleep, language development, social development, and physical activity. Reuters reported that the UK measure aligns with a broader global trend of stricter digital protections for children.

#### 5. Japan's 275 kmph Cargo Bullet Train: World's First High-Speed Freight Shinkansen Explained

**In the News:** Japan has introduced a **freight-only Shinkansen** service operated by **JR East**. The service began on **23 March 2026** and uses a converted **E3 series** bullet train for cargo movement. Current reporting describes it as the world's first dedicated high-speed freight Shinkansen, operating at speeds of up to **275 kmph**. The initiative represents a major innovation in rail-based logistics.

##### Key Pointers

- The service is operated by East Japan Railway Company (JR East). It began operations on 23 March 2026 using a seven-car E3 series train converted from a former passenger Shinkansen set.
- The freight-only train runs between Morioka and Tokyo on the Tohoku Shinkansen corridor. Reporting states that the journey takes about 3 hours and 15 minutes, giving it a strong advantage for time-sensitive cargo.
- The reported operating speed is up to 275 kmph. This places the train among the fastest freight rail services in the world and marks a new use of high-speed rail infrastructure in commercial logistics.
- The converted train can carry about 1,000 boxes of goods with a maximum loading capacity of around 17.4 tonnes. The project is linked to rising logistics demand, driver shortages, and lower-emission freight alternatives.

#### 6. Earth Hour 2026: 20 Years of WWF's Global Movement for Climate, Sustainability & Health

**In the News: Earth Hour 2026** was observed on **28 March 2026 at 8:30 p.m. local time**. The official Earth Hour platform described the 2026 edition as a celebration of **20 years of impact**. The movement began in **Sydney in 2007** and has since developed into a global campaign for climate action, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable living. The annual observance continues to retain symbolic and educational significance worldwide.

#### Key Pointers

- Earth Hour began in Sydney in 2007. The Earth Hour milestones page records the first event on 31 March 2007, when more than 2.2 million people participated by switching off lights for one hour.
- The 2026 edition marked 20 years of the movement. The official Earth Hour website states that Earth Hour 2026 was held on 28 March 2026 at 8:30 p.m. local time.
- Earth Hour has evolved beyond a symbolic lights-off campaign. The official platform now promotes the idea of “Give an Hour for Earth”, encouraging people to spend sixty minutes on meaningful action for the planet.
- The campaign links climate action, biodiversity protection, sustainability, and everyday behavioural change. The official materials frame Earth Hour as a wider global movement for the health of people and the planet.

### 7. Bab-el-Mandeb Strait

**In the News:** The **Bab-el-Mandeb Strait** has re-emerged as a major strategic concern amid the widening regional conflict involving Iran and the Houthis in Yemen. Reuters reported that Yemen’s Houthis expressed readiness to join the war in support of Iran, raising the risk of renewed disruption to shipping routes near the strait. The waterway connects the **Red Sea** to the **Gulf of Aden** and forms a critical link in the route toward the **Suez Canal**. Any sustained disruption would affect oil shipments, container trade, and global freight costs.

#### Key Pointers:

- Bab-el-Mandeb is a narrow maritime chokepoint between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. It connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, giving it major strategic importance for world trade.
- The strait is an essential route for oil and gas shipments moving between the Persian Gulf, Europe, and North America. The U.S. Energy Information Administration states that these Red Sea routes together accounted for about 12 percent of total seaborne-traded oil in the first half of 2023 and about 8 percent of worldwide LNG trade.
- The current security concern arises from the possibility of Houthi attacks on shipping in or near the strait. Reuters reported that the Houthis indicated readiness for military involvement, raising the risk of a new maritime front.
- Any disruption at Bab-el-Mandeb would also affect the wider Red Sea–Suez route. Vessel diversion around southern Africa would increase transit time, freight costs, and insurance burdens on global shipping.

### 8. Strait of Hormuz: Who Gets Through, Who Doesn’t — and Can Iran Charge Ships for Passage?

**In the News:** The **Strait of Hormuz** remains at the centre of the current Gulf crisis. Iran informed the United Nations and the International Maritime Organization that “**non-hostile**” vessels may transit the strait if they coordinate with Iranian authorities and do not support aggression against Iran. At the same time, vessel traffic has fallen sharply from normal levels. The issue has acquired legal significance in relation to **transit passage**, shipping access, and the permissibility of any passage charges.

#### Key Pointers

- The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world’s most important energy chokepoints. The International Energy Agency states that about 20 million barrels per day of crude oil and oil products moved through the strait in 2025, representing roughly 25 percent of global seaborne oil trade.
- Iran has stated that only “non-hostile” ships may pass, subject to coordination with Iranian authorities. Ships associated with parties supporting military action against Iran were excluded from this assurance in Tehran’s communication to the UN and the IMO.
- Traffic through the strait has dropped sharply during the crisis. The Wall Street Journal reported that only 11 vessels passed through the strait in a 24-hour period on 29 March 2026, compared with a normal daily flow of roughly 138 vessels.

- International law recognises a strong right of transit passage through straits used for international navigation. UNCLOS Part III provides that transit passage shall not be impeded, and foreign ships cannot ordinarily be charged merely for passage except in relation to specific services rendered.
- On that legal basis, a routine political or commercial toll for simple passage would be difficult to reconcile with UNCLOS principles. This is a legal inference drawn from the treaty text on transit passage and charges on foreign ships, while the practical maritime situation remains highly contested on the ground.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Mangroves in Focus After Supreme Court Coastal Road Decision

**In the News:** The Supreme Court of India declined to interfere with a Bombay High Court order permitting the removal of 45,675 mangrove trees for the proposed Versova-Bhayandar coastal road project in north Mumbai, sparking debate over balancing infrastructure development with environmental conservation in ecologically sensitive coastal regions.

#### Key Points:

- **The Supreme Court Decision:** A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi dismissed an appeal by NGO Vanashakti against the Bombay High Court's December 12 order clearing the project. The court said the road would have a 'significant and beneficial impact' by easing congestion on the western highway in northern Mumbai. The BMC was directed to submit annual reports to the High Court on compensatory afforestation and mangrove restoration.
- **About the Project:** The Rs 18,263-crore Versova-Bhayandar coastal road project is proposed by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). It seeks to extend the coastal road from Nariman Point to Bandra and connect it to the under-construction sea link between Bandra and Versova. Once completed, it will reduce travel time between Versova and Mira Bhayandar from nearly two hours to less than 20 minutes and cut the distance from 33.6 km to 23.2 km.
- **What are Mangroves?:** Mangroves are salt-tolerant trees and shrubs that grow in coastal intertidal zones of tropical and subtropical regions. They thrive in saline or brackish waters and are adapted to survive tidal fluctuations, high salinity, and oxygen-deficient soils, serving as a natural interface between land and sea.
- **Unique Adaptations of Mangroves:** Mangroves possess specialised survival features including roots that can filter or excrete salt, pneumatophores (aerial roots) that absorb oxygen from air in waterlogged soils, prop roots for structural stability, and vivipary — where seeds germinate while still attached to the parent tree, increasing survival chances in saline conditions.
- **Ecological Importance:** Mangrove forests are among the most carbon-rich ecosystems, playing a crucial role in carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation. They act as natural buffers against coastal erosion, cyclones, and storm surges, and provide vital habitats for diverse marine and terrestrial species, supporting biodiversity and fisheries.

### India logs 1BT coal output for second consecutive year

**In the News:** India achieved 1 billion tonnes (BT) of coal production for the second consecutive year, with the milestone being reached on March 20, 2026, amid heightened uncertainties in global energy markets due to the West Asia crisis. The achievement was announced by the Coal Ministry, highlighting strong planning, efficient execution, and tighter coordination across the coal value chain.

#### Key Points:

- **Historic Milestone:** India successfully achieved 1 billion tonne coal production for the second year in a row on March 20, 2026. This marks a significant achievement in India's domestic energy production capabilities, reflecting sustained and coordinated efforts across the coal sector.
- **Energy Security Context:** The higher and sustained coal output has helped India meet rising energy demand and supported the power sector in maintaining record coal inventories at coal-based thermal plants. India currently holds an overall coal stock of 88 days, sufficient to meet rising demand. This is particularly significant amid global energy market uncertainties due to the West Asia (Iran-Israel) crisis.



- **Role of Coal in India's Energy Mix:** Despite the rapid growth of renewable energy, coal remains critical to India's power sector. The intermittent nature of renewable sources and insufficient battery storage means that coal power continues to be relied upon for consistent electricity supply on demand.
- **Policy and Governance:** The Coal Ministry stated it remains focused on nurturing a stable, transparent and performance-oriented ecosystem through proactive policy measures, close performance tracking, and active stakeholder engagement to ensure dependable coal availability across sectors.
- **Viksit Bharat 2047 Connect:** The achievement is aligned with the national vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047', reinforcing the government's resolve to build a resilient energy framework, enhance domestic production capabilities, and drive sustainable economic development.

### Hudsonian Godwit

**In the News:** The Hudsonian godwit was proposed for international protection at the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS COP15), held in Campo Grande, Brazil, amid alarming reports of a 95% population decline over four decades.

#### Key Points:

- **About the Hudsonian Godwit:** The Hudsonian godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) is a migratory shorebird that undertakes one of the most extraordinary journeys in the animal kingdom — a 30,000 km annual migration from its Arctic breeding grounds to Patagonia (South America), including a non-stop flight of up to 11,000 km without eating, drinking, or sleeping.
- **Conservation Status:** Classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, it is one of 42 species proposed for international protection at CMS COP15, alongside the snowy owl, striped hyena, and hammerhead shark. Its survival depends on a highly predictable "geological clock" and abundant food resources at stopover sites — both of which are increasingly disrupted.
- **Expert Observation:** Ecologist Nathan Senner (University of Massachusetts Amherst), who has studied the species for 20 years, noted that most species can adapt to one kind of change — but not multiple simultaneous threats, making the godwit's crisis emblematic of the broader decline of migratory birds globally.
- **About CMS (Bonn Convention):** A legally binding international treaty under UNEP, adopted in 1979 in Bonn, Germany and enforced in 1983, providing a global framework for protecting migratory species across national boundaries. Range states are legally obliged to protect listed species, conserve and restore habitats, prevent migration obstacles, and cooperate internationally.
- **CMS Appendices:** Appendix I lists endangered migratory species requiring strict protection — 188 species, including India's Great Indian Bustard, Siberian Crane, Olive Ridley Turtle, and Leatherback Turtle. Appendix II covers species with unfavourable conservation status, promoting international cooperation through agreements and MoUs.
- **CMS COP:** The Conference of the Parties (COP) serves as the decision-making body of CMS, reviewing implementation and updating conservation measures at each meeting.

## IMPORTANT DAYS

### World Water Day 2026 Highlights Water and Gender Theme

**In the News:** World Water Day 2026 was observed on March 22, 2026, with the theme "Water and Gender" and the campaign tagline "Where Water Flows, Equality Grows." The Prime Minister of India extended greetings on the occasion, which serves as a global platform to emphasise the importance of freshwater and the need for sustainable water management.

#### Key Points:

- **About World Water Day:** World Water Day is observed annually on March 22 under the aegis of the United Nations. The idea was first proposed during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The first World Water Day was celebrated in 1993, and has been observed every year since.
- **2026 Theme — "Water and Gender":** The theme underscores the critical role played by women and girls in water management. In many parts of the world, women are primarily responsible for collecting water for their families, yet



they are often excluded from decision-making processes about water policies and infrastructure. The campaign advocates for equal participation, leadership, and decision-making for women and girls in managing water resources.

- **Connection to SDG 6:** A central objective of World Water Day is to support Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6), which aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. The observance highlights the need for equitable access to clean water and improved sanitation facilities globally.
- **Significance of the Day:** World Water Day raises awareness about pressing water challenges such as water scarcity, pollution, and lack of sanitation facilities. Millions of people across the globe still struggle to access safe drinking water. The day motivates individuals, governments, and communities to adopt sustainable water management practices and protect freshwater ecosystems.
- **Gender and Water — Key Issue:** The 2026 theme draws attention to gender disparities in access to water resources and the disproportionate burden placed on women in water collection and household water management. Experts believe that empowering women in water-related decisions can help address the global water crisis more effectively, making gender-sensitive approaches in water governance essential.

### World TB Day 2026

**In the News:** World TB Day 2026 was observed on **24 March** under the theme “**Yes! We can End TB! Led by countries. Powered by people.**” The day is in the news because the WHO used the occasion to call for stronger country leadership, wider use of innovation, and faster progress toward ending tuberculosis. The observance also gained added significance because WHO issued new recommendations on easier and quicker TB diagnostics. World TB Day remains important for public health awareness because TB is still one of the world’s deadliest infectious diseases.

#### Key Pointers

- World TB Day is observed every year on 24 March. The date marks the day in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced the discovery of the bacterium that causes tuberculosis.
- The 2026 theme is “Yes! We can End TB! Led by countries. Powered by people.” The theme stresses that ending TB requires political leadership, financing, innovation, and community-centred implementation.
- WHO states that 83 million lives have been saved since 2000 through global TB efforts. It also notes that 10.7 million people fell ill with TB in 2024 and 1.23 million died from the disease in that year.
- WHO released new recommendations on near-point-of-care TB diagnostic tools on World TB Day 2026. These tests can operate on battery power, give results in less than an hour, and are available at less than half the cost of many existing molecular diagnostics.
- WHO also highlighted easier sample collection and testing strategies such as tongue swabs and sputum pooling. These are intended to widen access, improve early detection, and reduce delays in treatment initiation.

## SPORTS

### Khelo India Tribal Games 2026

**In the News:** The **first-ever Khelo India Tribal Games 2026** has been announced as a new national-level sporting event dedicated exclusively to tribal athletes. It is being hosted by **Chhattisgarh**, making the state the first host of this new Khelo India format. The Union Sports Minister announced that the Games would begin from **25 March 2026**, with competitions spread across **Raipur, Jagdalpur, and Sarguja**.

#### Key Pointers

- Khelo India Tribal Games 2026 is the inaugural edition of a tribal-focused national multi-sport event under the Khelo India programme. It has been launched to promote both indigenous and mainstream sports among tribal communities and to provide tribal athletes with a recognised national platform.
- The host state is Chhattisgarh, and the Games are being conducted across three cities—Raipur, Jagdalpur, and Sarguja. The choice of Chhattisgarh is significant because of its large tribal population and strong cultural association with

tribal identity. Officially, Chhattisgarh has been described as the first state to host this landmark national event dedicated exclusively to tribal athletes.

- The Games feature seven medal sports: athletics, football, hockey, weightlifting, archery, swimming, and wrestling. In addition, mallakhamb and kabaddi have been included as demonstration sports.
- Khelo India Tribal Games is part of the broader Khelo India Scheme, which is a flagship Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. The Khelo India framework aims at mass participation and sporting excellence, and one of its recognised verticals is the promotion of rural and indigenous/tribal games. Thus, the Tribal Games are not a separate scheme, but a specialised extension within the existing Khelo India ecosystem.
- The event is being jointly managed by multiple institutions, including the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, the Sports Authority of India, the Indian Olympic Association, National Sports Federations, and the Chhattisgarh state organising committee. This multi-agency structure is important because it shows that the Games are being organised with national-level technical standards rather than as a purely state event.
- The official mascot of the Games is “Morveer.” According to the official description, “Mor” in Chhattisgarhi conveys the sense of “our own,” while “Veer” represents courage and valour. The mascot therefore symbolises the pride, bravery, community identity, and resilience of India’s tribal communities, making it an important cultural as well as sporting symbol of the event.

### LeBron James Surpasses Robert Parish with Historic NBA Milestone

**In the News:** LeBron James has moved past **Robert Parish** to become the **NBA’s all-time leader in regular-season games played**. He set the new record by appearing in his **1,612th regular-season game** for the Los Angeles Lakers against the Orlando Magic on **March 21, 2026**. The milestone is significant because it highlights not only longevity but also elite performance deep into his **23rd NBA season**. The record adds to LeBron’s already unmatched résumé as the league’s **all-time leading scorer** and one of its most durable stars.

#### Key Pointers:

- LeBron James broke Robert Parish’s long-standing record of 1,611 games by playing his 1,612th regular-season game. This made him the new all-time leader in NBA regular-season appearances. The record was set in the Lakers’ game against the Orlando Magic.
- Before breaking the record, LeBron had tied Parish at 1,611 games against the Miami Heat. He reached the tie at age 41, underlining his extraordinary longevity in a physically demanding league. He is already one of the most decorated players in NBA history.
- LeBron is in his 23rd NBA season, one more than Vince Carter’s previous mark for most seasons played. This makes the games-played record even more notable because it reflects both fitness and sustained selection at the top level. Few players remain central contributors this late in their careers.
- At the time of tying Parish’s record, LeBron was averaging 21.4 points, 6.8 assists, and 5.6 rebounds this season. Thus, the milestone was not merely symbolic; he was still producing at a high competitive standard. This strengthens the importance of the record in sports history.
- The milestone adds to a résumé that already includes four NBA titles, four MVP awards, and the NBA all-time scoring record. For exam purposes, remember that this particular milestone relates specifically to regular-season games played, not total games including playoffs. That distinction is important.

### Olympics Transgender Ban 2028: IOC Rules, SRY Gene Test Explained

**In the News:** The International Olympic Committee (IOC) Executive Board approved a new Policy on the Protection of the Female Category, limiting eligibility for female events at the Olympic Games to biological females, effective from the LA28 Olympic Games onwards.

#### Key Points:

- **The Core Rule:** Eligibility for any female category event at the Olympic Games and all IOC events — both individual and team sports — is now restricted to biological females, determined through a one-time SRY gene screening.

- **What is the SRY Gene Test?** The SRY (Sex-determining Region Y) gene is a segment of DNA typically found on the Y chromosome that initiates male sex development in the womb. Its presence is fixed throughout life. Screening is done via saliva, cheek swab, or blood sample — considered minimally intrusive. Athletes who test SRY-negative permanently satisfy the eligibility criteria and need never be tested again.
- **Exceptions — CAIS & DSDs:** Athletes diagnosed with Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS) or certain other rare differences/disorders of sex development (DSDs) — who do not benefit from testosterone's performance-enhancing effects — may still be eligible for the female category despite an SRY-positive result.
- **What Happens to SRY-Positive Athletes?** Transgender (XY) and androgen-sensitive XY-DSD athletes remain eligible for male category events, designated male slots in mixed events, open category events, and sports that do not classify by sex.
- **Why Was the Policy Made?** A working group reviewed the latest scientific evidence and reached a clear consensus: male sex provides a measurable performance advantage in all sports relying on strength, power, and endurance. The IOC deemed that fairness and safety in the female category require eligibility based on biological sex.
- **How Was It Developed?** The policy emerged from an IOC review spanning September 2024 to March 2026, involving experts in sports science, endocrinology, transgender medicine, ethics, and law from all five continents. Over 1,100 athletes responded to an online survey, and in-depth interviews were also conducted with impacted athletes.

## AWARDS

### Nandamuri Balakrishna Receives Lifetime Achievement at IFFD 2026

**In the News:** Legendary Telugu actor Nandamuri Balakrishna was conferred with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Film Festival of Delhi (IFFD) 2026, held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, in recognition of his five-decade contribution to Indian cinema.

#### Key Points:

- **About the Award:** The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented by Delhi's Honorary Chief Minister Rekha Gupta in the presence of dignitaries from the film and cultural sectors. The honour recognized Balakrishna's versatility, unparalleled dedication, and indelible influence on Indian cinema over 50 years.
- **Special Screening:** Balakrishna's acclaimed film Bhagavanth Kesari, directed by Anil Ravipudi and produced by Sahu Garapati, was specially screened at the festival. The film had previously won the Best Film in Telugu award at the 71st National Film Awards.
- **Balakrishna's Career:** With a film career spanning 50 years, Balakrishna is one of the most celebrated actors in Telugu cinema, known for his versatility and mass appeal across genres. He is the son of legendary actor-politician N. T. Rama Rao, whose legacy he continues to honour.
- **Padma Bhushan:** In 2025, the Government of India conferred Balakrishna with the Padma Bhushan — India's third-highest civilian award — in recognition of his immense contribution to arts and cinema.

**About IFFD:** The International Film Festival of Delhi (IFFD) is a prestigious cultural platform showcasing Indian and global cinema, recognising excellence in filmmaking across languages and industries.